

Sixty-Five Sonnets of Shakespeare

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Preface

This selection from Shakespeare's *Sonnets* is intended for the upper forms of schools, but might also be of interest to first-year undergraduates.

Few schools will want to study all the *Sonnets* as part of an English course, and a representative selection is not, as far as we know, available. A dozen or so chosen for their individual merit appear in most anthologies, but that is insufficient for school study. The aim of this selection is to represent the range and variety of the *Sonnets*, and so to give a more comprehensive idea than anthologies can give of what the whole collection is like. Some of our 65 are certainly not among 'The World's Greatest Poems': like other poets Shakespeare did not always write on an impeccably high level: but this selection does represent characteristic themes on which he wrote in the *Sonnets*, and the varying structures, movement of thought and feeling, and development of imagery to be found in them.

The text has been modernized in spelling and punctuation. Readers may note here variations in some of the poems from versions they have met in anthologies or in editions of the complete works—differences occasionally in a word or a phrase, more often in the punctuation. Full discussion of all such points will be found, by those interested, in our complete edition of the *Sonnets* (University of London Press Ltd, 1964). There are still a number of places in the *Sonnets* where it is uncertain what the correct wording may be, and editors have to make up their own minds. As to punctuation, there is no evidence that the punctuation of the earliest printed text (the 1609 Quarto) was Shakespeare's own, for no one knows from what sort of manuscript or copy the printer of that edition worked. The punctuation in modern editions varies, but is (rightly) seldom that of the 1609 text. It generally follows, however, too conservatively, that of nineteenth-century editors and printers. We have repunctuated somewhat more freely, aiming to bring out as clearly as possible for a modern reader the sense, feeling and movement of the lines.

We preface the text with an essay on the subject matter and themes of the whole collection, which should help the reader to approach those selected here with some informed conception of their content.

The Notes accompanying the text are designed 1. to explain words and allusions, 2. to help towards the understanding of the overall meaning of the poems, and 3. to indicate their poetic texture and structure.

Part II of the book consists of essays on matters such as Elizabethan Vocabulary 1 Idiom and Elizabethan Rhetoric, and Shakespeare's personal use of these and of poetic imagery. Some understanding of all this is really essential to that fuller appreciation of the poems which might be expected to come on second or later readings. We did not, however, wish to intrude these matters between a reader coming to the *Sonnets* for the first time and the initial impact on him of the poems themselves.

Part III of the book is designed for more advanced and specialist pupils in schools, and for first-year undergraduates in universities. It contains two essays introductory of more academic topics concerning the *Sonnets*. The first essay offers a brief introduction to the so-called 'problems' raised by the *Sonnets*—exactly when they were written; to whom they were addressed and who were the several personalities involved in them; who the 'Mr W. H.' was, to whom the 1609 publisher dedicated the book; and in what sense 'Mr W. H.' was the 'only begetter' of the poems. Copious speculation and even heated controversy have been aroused by these 'problems'. Indeed, such speculation and controversy have too much distracted both readers and critics from consideration of the poems themselves as poems. The aim of this edition is to present the poems from a literary point of view; but for the benefit of those interested in such 'problems' we include this short essay. The second, and longer essay in Part III concerns earlier sonnet writing and other poetic traditions in relation to Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. After becoming familiar with the poems themselves a reader can gain further understanding by learning something of their setting in poetic tradition and in the history of sonnet-writing. It is hoped that this essay may help readers towards that end.

The editors wish to express their gratitude to Mr D. H. Giles, Senior English Master at Bancroft's School, Woodford, for some wise advice on the contents and arrangement of the critical material.

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Part 1

The Subject Matter and Themes of the Sonnets

There is no known autograph manuscript of the *Sonnets*, and we have no ground for believing that Shakespeare authorized the printing of them, let alone that he saw them through the press. Hence we have no authority for regarding the order of the poems in the earliest printed edition (the 1609 Quarto) as Shakespeare's own, and expecting it to unfold a straight story. Moreover, Elizabethan sonnet collections, though often spoken of as 'sequences', do not specifically tell a continuous story. Such collections do not narrate events, but express and describe feelings, and varying phases of love.

Very many attempts have been made to rearrange Shakespeare's 154 sonnets so as to make them trace out a continuous story. None of these is really convincing, and there are numerous and often violent divergences even among the closest of them. We have therefore numbered this selection by the numbers the poems bear in the earliest text, whose order is generally followed in modern editions. But however Shakespeare might have intended them to be arranged, certain clear groups and recurrent themes may be distinguished.

GROUPS

The main groups into which we can cast the poems (always remembering that some poems may well have been displaced from the right order) are:

I. A group (nos. 1-17 inclusive) addressed to a young man of rank and of natural gifts, both physical and intellectual, urging him to marry and perpetuate these gifts by begetting a son.

II. A second group (nos. 18-126) apparently concerned with and mostly addressed to the same young man and recording the poet's experience of varying moods and tensions excited by his warm friendship for the younger man. These, whose order in the 1609 Quarto intermingles poems of the first three subdivisions we shall now make, include—

(a) Sonnets expressing the poet's devotion to his friend, praise of his

beauty and gifts, and a challenge that this love, recorded in verse, will defy time and outlive his friend's death and his own. In this class may be put Sonnets 18-26, 29-32, 37 and 38, 46, 53-5, 59, 60, 62-8 and 71-7.

(b) Sonnets of the poet's distress when absent from his friend, and of the anguish caused by temporary estrangement, seemingly on more than one occasion and ground—poems, that is, of physical or spiritual separation. This class, the sequence of which appears somewhat confused and overlaps with sonnets of Group II(a), includes poems expressive of the tension set up when the young friend apparently steals the poet's mistress. The sonnets in this class are nos. 27 and 28, 33-6, 39-42, 43-5, 47-9, 50 and 51, 56-8, 61, 69 and 70, 87-96.

(c) A group (nos. 78-86) which suggest that a rival poet has won the friend's favour, silencing Shakespeare with 'the proud full sail of his great verse' in his tributes.

(d) A group (nos. 97-126) that seem to record a reconciliation and a return (not without a backward look to the tensions of Group II(b)) to the moods of Group II(a).

III. A group (nos. 127-45 and 147-52) addressed not to the young man, but to a woman (by no means necessarily, though quite probably, the mistress of Group II(b)). This woman, as false as she is enticing, unscrupulous, and of a dark beauty unfashionable in the poetry of that time, has betrayed the poet, seducing his friend. But she still holds for Shakespeare an evil fascination.

IV. Sonnet 146 does not fit precisely into any of the three groups above, but appears to be a poem of self-analytical spiritual contemplation. And the 1609 book closes with two trivial pieces of superficial and conventional versification (actually adaptations of a fifth-century Byzantine poem), of a quality vastly inferior to almost anything in the rest of the volume.

THEMES

The forementioned matters variously provide the impulse or occasion for each poem. But a lyric poem is not a plain record of events, nor is a collection of sonnets a factual diary. A lyric poem embodies the writer's

experience in face of a situation emotionally and intellectually apprehended and expressed through the medium of words, rhythms and, frequently, imagery (Shakespeare's use of which we discuss in an essay in Part II of this book)—all, where the poem is successful, harmonized into a unified whole. Though these elements will be blended in a way that makes them interact, so that for a complete apprehension of the poem they are ultimately inseparable, it is useful for discussion to recognize that a poet will find certain ideas, problems or reflections dominate his thinking and feeling, just as certain images or uses of imagery will dominate his expression and become one of his distinguishing characteristics: and in the *Sonnets* we find a recognizable number of such dominant themes. The most important of these themes are:

1. the praise of *beauty*, and the recognition of its qualities
2. the nature also of *truth* (a word that bears several meanings)
3. the nature, and the experience, of *love*
4. the conflict of *time*, the destroyer of all things, with love, beauty and youth; and closely connected with this:
5. the apprehension of *mutability*—of the quality of all things being subject to change

A reader who has borne in mind the list we made above of the chief matters or occasions of the *Sonnets* will recognize that other themes must also recur—the strains provoked by absence, by jealousy that conflicts with devotion, by rivalry and suspicion. To list all would seem like devising titles for most of the sonnets individually. We shall only say a few things about the major themes: and these themes will be seen inevitably to overlap and intermingle.

Beauty is naturally a major theme in the first group of sonnets; for this is one of the qualities the friend is urged to transmit to posterity. But the beauty extolled in the *Sonnets* is not solely physical beauty. Many as are the allusions to the young man's outward beauty, such a poem as no. 54 looks deeper.

The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.

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The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.

And that odour is 'truth'—constancy, loyalty and integrity. When the physical beauty of the youth shall have vanished, his constancy and integrity will, drop by drop, like the distillation of a perfume, be concentrated and stored for posterity in the poet's verse which it inspired:

When that shall vade, by verse distills your truth.

(that being the youth's 'rose' of physical beauty).

Thus *Truth* and Beauty are inextricably intertwined in the *Sonnets*. The word *truth* carries many meanings, and the play on these is constantly present. 'Fidelity', 'veracity', 'rightness and proper proportion', 'reality, or fact', 'genuineness'—these in especial are relevant to the concept of Beauty.

Both truth and beauty on my love depends . . .

Truth needs no colour with his colour fix'd,

Beauty no pencil beauty's truth to lay. (Sonnet 101)

The friend's beauty is 'true'; it needs no 'painting' or embellishment; it epitomizes all the concepts of beauty that earlier times conceived (Sonnets 53 and 106): Nature has made him as an image of perfection,

And him as for a map doth Nature store,

To show false Art what beauty was of yore. (Sonnet 68)

So strong is this theme in the *Sonnets* that some critics, indeed, have seen in them a Platonic conception of the Idea of Beauty—an abstract perfection of which any one concrete embodiment can only be an imperfectly realized example.

Such a beauty should be 'true' in every sense—not only in the physical: to betray fidelity and moral perfection in such a frame of physical grace is a blasphemy against the ideal. But herein lies the human reality and the cause of many of the tensions in the *Sonnets*. Such exquisiteness of grace has enormous power of seduction: it can corrupt, and can itself be both the tempter and the prey of the tempter,

. . . if that flower with base infection meet,

The basest weed outbraves his dignity.

and (*corruptio optimi pessima*)—

Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds. (Sonnet 94)

A fearful tension may be set up by suspicion that one's idol of perfection is flawed:

... what's so blessed fair that fears no blot?
Thou mayst be false and yet I know it not. (Sonnet 92)

This is the tension of Sonnets 92 and 94.

But, as we have said, not all the Sonnets are addressed to the friend. The dark, false woman is the subject of another group, and here some of the themes receive a fiercer treatment. Her beauty is not the conventional fair complexion of so many sonneteers; and the poet is prepared to defy and deride that convention, for this woman fascinates him irresistibly.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun . . .
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks . . .
And yet by heaven I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare. (Sonnet 130)

Yet, just as the friend betrayed him (in Group II(b)), so does this woman, seducing his friend. Hence a conflict is aroused between the ideal and the reality, between the fascination and the fact, between 'troth' and 'truth'.

When my love swears that she is made of truth
I do believe her, though I know she lies. (Sonnet 138)

Self-deception directed by passion is at war with the chill realization of another facet of 'truth'—that of reality: and the result is fever and madness (Sonnet 147):

For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

(Compare odi et amo. quare id faciam fortasse requiris.
nescio. sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

Catullus, *Carmen* LXXXV)

So Truth and Love unite in the *Sonnets*: truth as fidelity, as honesty, as genuineness and as reality; love as devotion, as friendship and as sensual

passion. Infatuation for the false woman who betrays troth and seduces the poet's friend: devotion to the friend who steals the poet's mistress, who can turn cold and reject him, who fails to preserve the moral purity that the ideal of beauty requires—these provoke a succession of conflicts with the ideals and demands of Beauty, of Truth, and of Love.

For *Love* in these sonnets is friendship between men as well as sexual love between a man and a woman. We need not worry with the conventionally 'stiff-upper-lipped' Englishman's embarrassment at the (to him) exaggeratedly emotional language used in describing the reactions and situations involved in the vicissitudes of this male friendship. Elizabethans were far less inhibited than Englishmen today in expressing emotion. Tough piratical seamen, worldly courtiers and hardened soldiers were often then recorded as shedding tears, and greeted each other on occasion with that 'terribly un-English' demonstrativeness with which a foreign statesman will embrace a cosmonaut, an ally—or a rival. There is nothing inherently unhealthy in speaking of the 'love' of a man for his friend, nor in that friend's being younger than himself. And the emotional tensions of friendship that is strained are no less strong than those of sexual passion. What is noteworthy about the theme as Shakespeare treats it is his insistence on the concept of complete *spiritual union* between friends *to the point of personal identity*. Shakespeare repeatedly refers to the friend as his 'other self': an estrangement between them is a division of himself; he must even take his friend's part against himself:

For thee, against myself I'll vow debate, [i.e. war]
For I must ne'er love him whom thou dost hate.
(Sonnet 89)

The conceit is far from uncommon in Renaissance poetry. Sir Philip Sidney employed it in a well-known lyric in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*:

My true love hath my heart, and I have his,
By just exchange one for the other given.
I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss:
There never was a better bargain driven. . . .

His heart his wound receivèd from my sight:
My heart was wounded with his wounded heart,
For as from me on him his hurt did light
So still methoug^{ht} in me his heart did smart:
Both equal hurt, in this change sought our bliss.
My true love hath my heart and I have his.

But in Sidney this is a song sung by a shepherdess to a lover who lies with his head in her lap: the lyric is exquisitely artificial, the 'wound' is the conventional wound from Cupid's dart. Shakespeare employs the conceit with a note of sincerity, deriving from the urgency of the real experience described, that is more convincing than we find elsewhere.

Against these themes of Beauty, Truth and Love Shakespeare repeatedly counterpoints that of *Time*, the destroyer of all things, the enemy of youth and beauty and in the end, perhaps, of love itself. Fully half the occurrences of the word *time*—it occurs just over 70 times in the whole 154 sonnets—allude to time as the arch-foe, and in such contexts it is frequently personified. It is 'never-resting time', that 'leads summer on/To hideous winter and confounds him there' (Sonnet 5); it is 'wasteful time' (Sonnet 15)—i.e. time that lays waste all things—'this bloody tyrant Time' (Sonnet 16), 'Devouring Time' that blunts the lion's paws (Sonnet 19): it is 'swift-footed', and its 'injurious', 'fell' hand bears the hour-glass whose sands all too quickly run out and the sickle that reaps all things mortal: it is 'sluttish', leaving rich tombs and memorial brasses obscured with dust (Sonnet 55): it is 'thievish' and 'stealthy', a digger of furrows in the brow of youth and beauty and a destroyer of its own gifts (Sonnet 60). Against Time the poet urges constant war and defiance (e.g. Sonnets 15, 19, 49, 63, 123): and it is in the name of his love for his friend that he declares his challenge—that the power of verse can confer an immortality that shall march boldly and defiantly "Gainst death and all oblivious enmity" (Sonnet 55)—that his friend's beauty 'shall in these black lines be seen/And they shall live' (Sonnet 63),

... and Death to me subscribes, [i.e. submits]
Since spite of him I'll live in this poor rhyme . . .

And thou in this shalt find thy monument
When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

(Sonnet 107)

Yet, despite this defiance—complementary to it, in fact—there runs through many of the sonnets a thread of melancholy resentment at the transitoriness of beauty and happiness. The theme of *Mutability* attributes to all things a zenith, from which, at the moment of achievement, like the sun at noon they must decline. It makes the poet consider how

every thing that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment. (Sonnet 15)

—how

Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crookèd eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.
(Sonnet 60)

There is continual 'interchange of state': the ocean erodes the shore, the land gains in exchange from the ocean (Sonnet 64),

And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
(Sonnet 18)

Beauty 'like a dial hand/Steal[s] from his figure, and no pace perceiv'd' (Sonnet 104). The sweets of the 'wide world' are 'fading sweets'; the sun mounts only to fall, eclipses and clouds obscure its light, and references to the seasons are continually but reminders of 'beauteous springs to yellow autumn turn'd', of 'lofty trees . . . barren of leaves/Which erst from heat did canopy the herd', of the coming of 'the stormy gusts of winter's day/And barren rage of death's eternal cold'.

There is nothing novel in a *sic transit* theme and mood: the poetry of the Elizabethans is full of it. Their positive zest for living inescapably finds a negative counterpart in consciousness of life's brevity. Shakespeare expresses it with exceptionally vivid imagery in lines of resonant music:

our sensory imagination responds to the vivid phrases with delight; our contemplative mind records the melancholy, the nostalgia, and the turmoil, in deeper tones of feeling; and sometimes there is a curious, disturbing contradiction and interplay between these reactions.

NOTE ON THE USE OF THE SLUR IN THIS TEXT

From the sixteenth to the late nineteenth century it was a common practice in printing verse to print an apostrophe in place of a vowel (almost always *e*) to indicate a lightening or semi-elision of a syllable. Thus 'the expense' would be printed 'th'expense', or 'the account' printed 'th'account'. For a modern reader this can be very misleading, as it seems to imply that the intervening syllable is entirely suppressed and not merely lightened; indeed we have often heard readers do this in reading aloud, thus destroying many delicate rhythms. This we believe to be completely wrong; so, to indicate that the syllable is lightened but not entirely suppressed, we have re-punctuated several such sequences, where the 1609 edition employed an apostrophe, with the device of a slur (—) below the line and joining the two words, as in Sonnet 30, line 8, 'the expense'.

The Sonnets — Text and Notes

General Note on Sonnets 1-17

The first 17 sonnets in the 1609 Quarto are appeals to a young man of great personal beauty and charm, and apparently of noble rank, to marry and beget an heir. Various arguments are used, the chief being that nature only confers personal gifts in trust to preserve and hand on as an inheritance, the natural desire to leave an image of oneself behind, and the threat of Time as a universal enemy. The argument from trusteeship insists that (see Sonnet 13) it is contrary to nature's law deliberately to refrain from reproduction.

Throughout the *Sonnets* there recur elements or echoes of the Platonic doctrine of 'Ideas'—of abstract essences which are the perfect realities of which the concrete individual trees, animals, people, etc., are the 'shadows'. How much of Plato's full theory Shakespeare really understood, or whether he could read Plato himself, we do not know, nor from what other source he drew what he knew. But the theory was sufficiently common in intelligent conversation for an alert mind to pick up a good deal in general terms. The chief 'Ideas' that recur in the *Sonnets* are those of an ideal 'Beauty' and an ideal 'Truth'.

2 *beauty's rose*] the ideal beauty, as noted in the General Note, above: the rose is a familiar figure for youthful beauty or for a paragon (cf. *Hamlet*, III, i, 155), and for the perfect flower.

4 *bear his memory*] 'present a living memorial of him to others'. 'Memory' in Shakespeare is common for the concrete memorial.

5 *contracted*] 'betrothed', 'bound by exclusive contract'; but possibly with a secondary sense (suggested by the following 'eyes') of 'narrowed in vision'—the young man admires only his own beauty and does not look at women.

6 *self-substantial*] consuming its own substance, as a candle does in burning, and so in the end self-destructive (cf. lines 13-14). In self-contemplation of self, beauty, like Narcissus, dooms itself to barren brevity.

10 *only*] 'principal', or 'pre-eminent'.

gaudy] 'joyously bedecked'. 'Gauds' meant jewels and finery. Lat. *gaudia* = 'joys'. The modern pejorative sense is not present in Shakespeare.

11 *within . . . bud*] The unexpanded flower stands for promise, but also for incompleteness. 'So longe is it called the budde of a rose, as it is not a perfyte rose' (Wynkyn de Worde).

content] probably both (1) that which is contained, and (2) contentment.

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
 That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
 But as the ripper should by time decease
 His tender heir might bear his memory: 4
 But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
 Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,
 Making a famine where abundance lies,
 Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel: 8
 Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament
 And only herald to the gaudy spring
 Within thine own bud buriest thy content,
 And, tender churl, mak'st waste in niggarding: 12
 Pity the world, or else this glutton be—
 To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

12 *tender*] as in the phrase 'tender years'. Cf. line 4.

churl] 'miser'—as in Coverdale's Bible (*Is*, xxxii, 5): 'Then shal the nigarde be no more called gentle nor the churle liberall'. The oxymoron with 'tender' would strike an Elizabethan, and is perhaps strengthened by the suggestion of 'ill-mannered fellow'—'It is not very well-bred of you not to breed'.

mak'st waste in niggarding] i.e. the young man is wasting, by hoarding, what should be used for increase.

14 *To eat*] 'by being the kind of glutton who eats'.

by the grave and thee] The world's due is propagation of the Friend's virtues in his heirs. His celibacy condemns these gifts to be twice devoured—ultimately by his death, and meanwhile by himself alone.

1 *forty winters*] Probably 'When you are pretty old' rather than 'In another forty years'. Otherwise, the 'fair child' of line 10 would then be about forty.

1-4 *besiege . . . trenches . . . totter'd weed*] the sustained image is the ragged uniform of the long-besieged defender ('you' and beauty) of the city (youth and vigour) against time.

3 *proud livery*] splendid array of beauty. Contrasting with 'totter'd weed' this may suggest a pun on the smart costume of a nobleman's servant (serving-youth) compared with the rags of a beggar (age). There is also, however, deriving from line 2, the image of flowers in beauty's field.

4 *totter'd*] 'tattered' was often so spelt in Elizabethan times.

weed] 'garment', but playing on the botanical sense in continuation of the metaphor in 'livery'.

6 *lusty*] 'full of animal spirits'—the commonest meaning in Shakespeare.

8] 'Would be a shameful admission of all-devouring greed, and self-praise given amiss for profitless living'. Such transposition of adjectives is common in Shakespeare.

9 *use*] echoing 'thrifless' (line 8); i.e. investment or the act of using property instead of unprofitable idleness of capital (youth and beauty). There is also probably a sexual meaning (see Glossary).

11 *sum my count*] render a balanced audit, 'square my account'.

make my old excuse] not 'make my same old excuse', but 'in my old age justify, by my heir's existence, my having lived'.

12 *by succession*] one of the many instances of the strict use of legal terms in the *Sonnets*.

2

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
 And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
 Thy youth's proud livery, so gaz'd on now,
 Will be a totter'd weed of small worth held: 4
 Then being ask'd where all thy beauty lies,
 Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,
 To say within thine own deep sunken eyes
 Were an all-eating shame, and thriftless praise. 8
 How much more praise deserv'd thy beauty's use
 If thou couldst answer: 'This fair child of mine
 Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse',—
 Proving his beauty by succession thine! 12.
 This were to be new made when thou art old,
 And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.

Nature's beautiful things will individually fade, but their essence may be distilled and preserved for future times.

1] The wording of the line suggests a personification of 'hours' as high-born ladies working a picture in needlework.

hours] as often in earlier speech, a disyllable.

gentle] plays, perhaps, on (1) 'kindly' (cf. the 'tyrants' of line 3), and on (2) *gentil* = 'refined' (as the picture, the result of this work, shows).

2 *lovely gaze*] 'the lovely object of vision'.

4 *unfair*] 'deprive of beauty'.

fairly] 'in beauty'. Cf. the use of 'youngly' in Sonnet 11, line 3.

6 *confounds*] 'ruins', 'utterly destroys' (as in Sonnet 60, line 8, and Sonnet 64, line 10).

9 *distillation*] i.e. the essence of summer distilled into perfume.

11] 'The whole impact on the senses, and also the fruit, of beauty would be lost when the beauty itself faded.'

12] 'And we should have neither the beauty itself nor anything to remind us of it.'

remembrance] as in *Othello*, III, iii, 291, 'This was her first remembrance from the Moor', a 'keepsake', a token by which to keep something or some person in memory.

14 *Leese*] 'lose'; a frequent form until the seventeenth century.

5

*Those hours that with gentle work did frame
 The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell
 Will play the tyrants to the very same,
 And that unfair which fairly doth excel: 4
 For never-resting time leads summer on
 To hideous winter and confounds him there,
 Sap check'd with frost, and lusty leaves quite gone,
 Beauty o'ersnow'd and bareness everywhere: 8
 Then were not summer's distillation left
 A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,
 Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,
 Nor it nor no remembrance what it was. 12
 But flowers distill'd, though they with winter meet,
 Leese but their show: their substance still lives sweet.*

If everyone remained unmarried the human race would die out. Let inferior people remain celibate: it is the duty of those best endowed by Nature to reproduce their kind. There is a secondary strain of word associations—'departest'—'bestow'st'—'increase'—'store' (contrasting with 'wane', 'barrenly', 'perish' and 'die')—which suggests investment of Nature's capital.

1-2] 'Out of the seed you sow, you will grow, in a child of your making, as fast as you yourself decline.'

departest] = 'impartest', 'bestowest' (i.e. your seed); not, here, 'leavest behind' (your youth).

3 *youngly*] 'in youth' (cf. 'fairly' = 'in beauty', in Sonnet 5, line 4).

bestow'st] 'Bestow' frequently in Shakespeare means 'lay out', 'invest'.

4 *convertest*] 'turnest away'.

5-6 *Herein . . . Without*] 'Within (this course of action) . . . outside (of this).'

6 *cold decay*] i.e. thin-blooded dull decline.

7 *the times should cease*] the generations of men would die out.

8 *threescore*] i.e. roughly a man's lifetime.

9 *store*] 'breeding' (as in 'store cattle').

10 *featureless*] i.e. lacking good looks.

rude] 'uncouth'.

11 *Look*,] an admonitory interjection.

11] 'The best endowed creatures (those made for breeding from) are also given by Nature the most generative vitality.'

12 *bounteous gift*] i.e. the gift of procreation.

in bounty] 'by being bountiful'—i.e. prolific.

13 *seal*] the stamp from which an impression is made; not the wax that has been so impressed.

14 *copy*] Primarily, in Elizabethan English, the original *from* which a copy is made—the archetype. This does not here make literal sense (the friend must ultimately himself die); but 'copy' was also used in a transferred sense for 'pattern' and hence 'example' (cf. *Twelfth Night*, I, v, 261-3:

Lady, you are the cruellest she alive
If you will lead these graces to the grave
And leave the world no copy.

and *King Henry V*, III, i, 24: 'Be copy now to men of grosser blood'). But there may also here be a play on the Elizabethan sense 'plenty' (cf. Latin *copia*), in relation to the 'bounteous gift' of line 12.

As fast as thou shalt wane so fast thou grow'st
In one of thine from that which thou departest,
And that fresh blood which youngly thou bestow'st
Thou mayst call thine when thou from youth convertest: 4
Herein lives wisdom, beauty, and increase;
Without this, folly, age, and cold decay:
If all were minded so, the times should cease,
And threescore year would make the world away. 8
Let those whom nature hath not made for store—
Harsh, featureless, and rude—barrenly perish:
Look, whom she best endow'd she gave the more;
Which bounteous gift thou shouldst in bounty cherish: 12.
She carv'd thee for her seal, and meant thereby
Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die.

1-2] The clock is striking the time well on into the night. For sixteenth-century people long nights were full of fear and peril. (Cf. the Third Collect for Evensong in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer.) We should also remember that the Elizabethans went to bed earlier than we do.

2 *brave*] 'resplendent', showily beautiful.

4 *sable*] 'black'.

o'er-silver'd all] We do not propose in this edition teasing the student or young reader with variant readings and emendations; but this is one example of the editor's problem: 'What words did Shakespeare really write?' The reading adopted here seems to us the most probable of many possibilities. The Quarto reading *or siluer'd ore* has received very little support from scholars—as one Cambridge friend remarked to us, 'No poet would write "*or silver'd o'er*"'.

7-8] Shakespeare seems to be alluding to a harvest-home procession.

9-10 *Then ... That*] 'Then I begin thinking about your beauty, reflecting that. ...

10 *wastes of time*] 'things destroyed by time' (not 'deserts').

11 *do themselves forsake*] 'abandon themselves to decay' (cf. Latin *sese deserere*).

*12 *others*] not 'other people than you', but 'other sweets and beauties' (cf. line 11).

13 *Time's scythe*] This is not here a mere stereotype figure, but echoes the harvest image of lines 7-8.

14 *breed*] 'offspring'.

brave] 'defy'. But the word also echoes line 2, where the adjective 'brave' has a less defiant and more elegiac tone. Compare the variations in tone on the word 'state' in Sonnet 29. It is typical of Shakespeare's use of the movement of a sonnet to play on the different moods a word can reflect in different contexts, as a musician uses a phrase in different keys.

12

*When I do count the clock that tells the time,
 And see the brave day sunk in hideous night
 When I behold the violet past prime,
 And sable curls o'er-silver'd all with white; 4
 When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,
 Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,
 And summer's green all girded up in sheaves
 Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard: 8
 Then of thy beauty do I question make
 That thou among the wastes of time must go,
 Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake,
 And die as fast as they see others grow; 12
 And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence
 Save breed to brave him when he takes thee hence.*

The following sonnet may appear obscure at first sight through the apparently complex play on pronouns, but it becomes clear when the continuity of the image is apprehended. The 'you' of line 1 is the body and its beauty, and is opposed to the 'self' or soul. If the bodily beauty and the soul were identical, the former, like the latter, would be immortal. Shakespeare embodies what he considers the true relationship in the image of the eternal soul inhabiting a temporal house (see line 9). As long as the occupier remains heirless this house is held on a lease determinable by death. Provident economy would not allow 'so fair a house' to fall into decay through age or inoccupancy; but 'husbandry' (line 10, with an obvious play on the word) would produce an heir who would maintain the house both during the Friend's old age (line 11) and after his death (line 12).

1 *your self*] probably = 'your soul', and so we follow the 1609 Quarto, which prints, here and elsewhere, two words.

5-6 *lease . . . determination*] In the Law of Property 'determination' of an estate is its ending.

9 *house*] There is no suggestion that the Friend's family estate is in a bad way. The 'house' is the personal beauty which he can propagate.

10 *husbandry*] 'economy and good management'; also 'tillage', and so, with a play, via 'husband', on marriage.

12 *barren rage*] i.e. barren-making ravage. For the use of an adjective in this sense cf. *As You Like It*, II, vii, 132: 'Oppress'd with two weak evils, age and hunger'. 'Rage' seems several times in Shakespeare to be equivalent to 'ravage'—the effect of violence. He never uses the word 'ravage' itself.

14 *You had a father*] The argument, from 'had' being a past tense, that the Friend's father is dead, has some plausibility, but is inconclusive.

13

Oh that you were your self! but, love, you are
 No longer yours than you yourself here live
 Against this coming end you should prepare,
 And your sweet semblance to some other give: 4
 So should that beauty which you hold in lease
 Find no determination; then you were
 Your self again after yourself's decease,
 When your sweet issue your sweet form should bear. 8
 Who lets so fair a house fall to decay,
 Which husbandry in honour might uphold
 Against the stormy gusts of winter's day
 And barren rage of death's eternal cold? 12
 Oh none but unthrifts, dear my love you know:
 You had a father,—let your son say so.

3 *this . . . stage*] The familiar playhouse image for the world, common in Shakespeare and other writers, is very old. Plato, Plotinus, St Augustine, and many other philosophers and theologians spoke of God or the gods as spectators or stage-managers of the human scene. Here Shakespeare seems to develop the trope in a characteristic and individual way in lines 6–8.

4 *the stars . . . comment*] Elizabethan audiences were given to ‘commenting’ during performances, ‘cheering’ and ‘checking’ as in line 6. The application of this and the theatrical image generally to the stars is unusual. Astrology held that the stars ‘influenced’ by their qualities and conjunctions human life and circumstance. This action, less noisy than the playhouse audience’s, was known only by its effects.

6 *cheerèd*] ‘encouraged’, ‘incited’.

check’d] ‘rebuked’, ‘chidden’; and also ‘restrained’. Both terms have obviously a primary meaning relating to the ‘plants’ and the ‘sky’ (as = ‘weather’ or ‘season’); a secondary meaning in reference back to the stars as occult ‘influences’; and a tertiary in reference back yet again to the noisy playhouse audiences. Such use of multiple references of words is a feature of the *Sonnets*.

• *sky*] (1) weather and season affecting both the growth of plants and the welfare of men; (2) possibly also the celestial bodies once more, as affecting men’s fortunes—though, if present, this meaning is certainly fainter than in line 4, even if it has not already disappeared. It is as dangerous to look in Shakespeare for a continuous, consistent application of every sense and image as it is to assume that there is only one meaning for every word.

7 *Vaunt*] bear themselves proudly and vaingloriously. The primary sense with ‘in their sap’ derives from the lusty vigour of young plants; but there is probably a latent sense, from the theatre image, of the swaggering player—as in the *Macbeth* lines about the ‘poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/And then is heard no more’.

at height decrease] ‘when they have reached their prime, start to decline’.

8 *bare state*] ‘showy splendour’; alternatively, or even concurrently, ‘magnificent deportment’ (the V.I.P. manner).

out of memory] probably ‘when other people have forgotten what important folk they once were’; alternatively, ‘for ever and a day’. Though the latter seems to us the less probable sense, both meanings might, as with ‘vaunt’, retain a latent consciousness of the playhouse image—decayed players often wearing the finery they had once acted in (not infrequently handed on originally from a nobleman’s wardrobe) after it had lost both gloss and fashion.

9 *conceit . . . stay*] realization or apprehension of this transience and mutability.

When I consider every thing that grows
 Holds in perfection but a little moment,
 That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows
 Where on the stars in secret influence comment; 4
 When I perceive that men as plants increase,
 Cheerèd and check'd even by the selfsame sky,
 Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
 And wear their brave state out of memory: 8
 Then the conceit of this inconstant stay
 Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
 Where wasteful time debateth with decay
 To change your day of youth to sullied night; 12
 And all in war with Time for love of you,
 As he takes from you I engraft you new.

11 *Where*] i.e. in my sight.

wasteful] 'destructive'.

debateth] either (1) discusses, puts his head together with . . . or (2) disputes, arguing how they shall. A third meaning sometimes given, 'contends', would demand an opposition between time and decay, presumably in respect of their speed of action. Note that in line 13 it is Time alone that recurs as the enemy, which makes the idea of Time as victor in a contest with Decay irrelevant to the sonnet, and this third possible meaning improbable.

12 *sullied night*] night made gloomy—probably referring to old age rather than to death. Cf. *King Richard III*, IV, iv, 16: 'Hath dimmed your infant morn to aged night.'

14] 'As time withers your features, I give you new life by my verse.' Old trees are revived by inserting 'grafts' which, when they have 'taken', replace exhausted branches. The buds or shoots so inserted are called 'scions'—and this term Shakespeare uses, twice out of the only three times he employs it, with a clear metaphorical allusion or reference to breeding children (*The Winter's Tale*, IV, iii, 93 and *King Henry V*, III, v, 7).

1 *a summer's day*] It is possible that 'day' is used here for 'season' rather than for a single day. The whole phrase could then be construed as 'a summertime'. This makes the progression of the imagery logically more compact. Line 4, with its reference to the length of summer's tenure, appears less of a digression interposed between May's 'rough winds' (line 3) and the too hot or too cloudy weather of lines 5-6. Although 'day', in the sense of 'season' or 'period' is rare with an indefinite article, the usage is familiar in such other constructions as 'in Shakespeare's day'; and the following, not dissimilar from the present instance, occurs in *King Henry VI, Part Two*, II, i, 2: 'I saw not better sport these seven years' day'.

Yet, whatever *logical* difficulties may arise *later* in the sonnet from taking 'day' as meaning a 'day' rather than a 'period', most readers will find the impact of the first line evokes the image of a day in summer.

2 *lovely*] Not used in the modern, often trivial sense, but as (1) 'kind', 'gentle', and possibly (2), in relation to the friend, 'lovable'.

temperate] 'equable', 'even-tempered'.

3 *May*] We too easily forget that the 'Gregorian' reform of the calendar, which brought it into line with astronomical data and the natural course of the seasons, though adopted on the continent from 1582 onwards, was not introduced into Great Britain until 1752, when 11 days of September were omitted. So Shakespeare's May ran from our mid-May to our mid-June, and would therefore be part of our summer.

4 *date*] terminable period, fixed duration.

7 *every fair*] 'every beautiful thing', 'every beauty'. The sense is common in Shakespeare.

8 *untrimm'd*] 'stripped of its beauty'.

10 *ow'st*] 'ownest'.

11] Cf. the interesting verbal parallel in *Antony and Cleopatra*, V, ii, 317-18: 'Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies/A lass unparallel'd.'

12 *to . . . grow'st*] 'to grow to' is to coalesce or become incorporate in, as a graft coalesces with its parent stock; i.e. as long as time lasts the friend will last, recorded in lines of poetry men will never forget.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date: 4
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd: 8
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st: 12
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

This poem, with its vigorous opening lines, includes a number of the characteristic themes of the *Sonnets*. We have Time the enemy—the uncertainty of varying seasons, ‘glad and sorry’—the fading of the world’s ‘sweets’. There are the lines that Time ‘carves’ in the brow (cf. Sonnet 2), the longing for the Friend’s beauty to remain perpetual, the ideal Beauty’s pattern (cf. the introductory note on Sonnet 1) and the poet’s challenge to Time, that he can defeat him by perpetuating the Friend and his own love for the Friend, in his verse.

2] ‘And (as you habitually do) cause the earth to re-absorb the creatures which spring from her.’ (‘Sweet’ suggests primarily flowers.)

4] The Phoenix, a mythical bird, became a favourite literary symbol both of long life and of resurrection. There was only one Phoenix in the world at a time. When about to die it built a nest, set fire to it, and consumed itself, and from the ashes a Phoenix, deemed to be (miraculously) the same, rose to start a new cycle. As to its longevity in each cycle, manuscripts of Pliny’s *Natural History*, V, 2, give variously 40, 511, 540 and 560 years; and Philemon Holland’s translation (1601) gives 660!

in her blood] i.e. alive.

5 *fleets*] A second person singular in -s was a correct form in Shakespeare’s time, and we print this, as most editors do, for the rhyme. But it is very questionable whether the Elizabethan reader would have been troubled by the rhyme *fleet*’s . . . *sweets* which occurs in the 1609 Quarto—whether that be a compositor’s error or no.

10 *antique*] In Shakespeare’s time the two words we now distinguish as ‘antique’ and ‘antic’ (quaint) were both spelt indiscriminately and variously ‘antike’, ‘anticke’, ‘antick’ or ‘antique’. For both senses (‘old’ and ‘grotesque’) the accent was on the first syllable. As Shakespeare often plays on the two senses in a single line, the problem of choosing which spelling to print without obscuring for the modern reader the other sense is sometimes hard. Here the primary sense appears to be ‘caricaturing’ (from ‘antic’ = ‘grotesque’); but there is a strong hint here of the secondary sense ‘ancient’ (here = ‘immemorial’), and possibly, but only as an overtone, there is a third sense, ‘that draws pictures of old age’ (by adding wrinkles). The spelling *antique* is that of the 1609 Quarto.

11 *untainted*] Most probably here ‘unsullied’, ‘unstained’, the whole line then meaning ‘Let him as you pass remain unsullied in beauty’. The ingenious suggestion of a metaphor from tilting, although tempting in view of the previous word ‘course’—‘permit him to remain untouched or uninjured by your onslaught’—cannot be properly argued from any known linguistic grounds or parallels.

19

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
 And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;
 Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,
 And burn the long-liv'd phoenix in her blood; 4
 Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleets,
 And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,
 To the wide world and all her fading sweets:
 But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:— 8
 Oh carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
 Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen;
 Him in thy course untainted do allow
 For beauty's pattern to succeeding men. 12
 Yet do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong
 My love shall in my verse ever live young.

The poet repudiates the extravagant nature symbolism and comparisons employed by some of the Elizabethan imitators of Petrarch. Compare Sonnet 130 (remembering, though, that that concerns his mistress, The Dark Woman, this his praises of his friend). The repudiation, however, is couched in language so potent and splendid that it evokes a universe of wonder, which he then proceeds to reject in favour of the friend.

1 *Muse*] The Muses were in Greek mythology the goddesses who inspired writers and other artists. Here the word is used metonymously for 'poet'.

4] 'And when celebrating the beauty of his subject feels himself obliged to drag in everything else that's beautiful.'

rehearse] 'mention' or 'enumerate'.

5] Primarily 'Linking in splendid comparison'; but 'proud' also conveys the suggestion of flattery to the subject and self-satisfaction in the author.

7 *rare*] 'highly treasured' (not 'scarce').

8 *this . . . rondure*] 'this great enclosing roundness of the universe'.

12] i.e. the stars.

13 *that . . . well*] 'who are fond of retailing second-hand praises'.

14] i.e. I'm not a pedlar crying up my wares. (Indeed, I have no intention of putting you up for sale.)

21

*So is it not with me as with that Muse,
 Stirr'd by a painted beauty to his verse,
 Who heaven itself for ornament doth use
 And every fair with his fair doth rehearse, 4
 Making a couplement of proud compare
 With sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich gems,
 With April's first-born flowers and all things rare
 That heaven's air in this huge rondure hems. 8
 Oh, let me true in love but truly write,
 And then believe me my love is as fair
 As any mother's child, though not so bright
 As those gold candles fix'd in heaven's air: 12
 Let them say more that like of hearsay well;
 I will not praise that purpose not to sell.*

The poet, on a journey, thinks longingly of his friend.

2 *dear repose*] 'heartily welcome place of repose'.

travel] Spelt 'travaill' in the 1609 Quarto. The two words 'travel' and 'travail' were spelt indiscriminately with '-e-' or '-ai-', and both senses are obviously involved here. Either modern spelling obscures one sense. (See essay on 'Some Characteristics of Elizabethan Vocabulary and Idiom', p. 149, below.) 'Travel' coheres with 'journey' in line 3, so we print this spelling to suggest the primary sense here.

3, 4 *begins . . . To work my mind*] 'sets my mind a-working'.

6 *Intend*] Not 'purpose' but 'take their way on' (cf. Latin *iter intendere*).

8 *which*] 'such as'—i.e. utter darkness.

9 *imaginary*] 'imaginative'. Cf. *King Henry V*, Prologue I, 17: 'Let us . . . on your imaginary forces work'.

10 *their shadow*] 'the insubstantial image (of you) engendered by my thoughts'. 'Shadow' in Elizabethan English frequently means 'image', not 'shade'.

11 *ghastly*] The early sense of the word was 'causing terror'. It only later became influenced by 'ghost', and hence came to mean 'pallid'. Shakespeare's uses all seem to involve horror and fear rather than primarily pallor.

12 *old*] for Night is a hag.

14 *For thee*] 'on account of you'—but N.B. *for myself* = both (1) 'on account of myself' and (2) 'to the comfort of'. The greater richness of this second 'for' gives strength to the line.

Weary with toil I haste me to my bed,
 The dear repose for limbs with travel tir'd;
 But then begins a journey in my head
 To work my mind when body's work's expir'd: 4
 For then my thoughts, from far where I abide,
 Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
 And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
 Looking on darkness which the blind do see: 8
 Save that my soul's imaginary sight
 Presents their shadow to my sightless view,
 Which like a jewel hung in ghastly night
 Makes black night beauteous and her old face new. 12.
 Lo, thus by day my limbs, by night my mind,
 For thee, and for myself, no quiet find.

Though it is a great mistake to look in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* for a closely consecutive unfolding of a 'story', and though we cannot, either, take for granted that the 1609 order represents the order of composition, this poem certainly seems to continue the thought and occasion of Sonnet 27.

5 *other's*] = 'the other's', a common Shakespearean use. The 1609 Quarto printed *ethers*. Early editors read *other's*, which we restore. Most modern editors read *either's*.

6 *Do in consent shake hands*] 'unite in agreement'.

7 *The one . . . the other*] i.e. day and night.

to complain] 'by giving me cause to complain'.

9 *to please . . . bright*] The sense of the 1609 Quarto reading, which we have adopted, is uncertain. Either the whole clause is the object of 'tell' ('You are bright in order to please the day') or 'to please him' is an adverbial phrase modifying not 'art' but 'tell' ('In order to please the day, I tell him that you are bright').

10 *do'st him grace*] 'grace' is a noun and the object of 'do'st'. 'You confer beauty on him' (when it is a dull day).

•11 *flatter*] i.e. beguile by telling.

swart-complexion'd] 'black-faced'.

12] 'That' is to be understood at the beginning of the line—this is what the poet tells the night.

twire] 'peep'.

13–14] 'Each day lengthens the period of my sorrows, and each night intensifies my awareness of the length of my suffering.' Most modern editors adopt the emendation *strength* for *length*, but this seems unnecessary.

How can I then return in happy plight
 That am debarr'd the benefit of rest,
 When day's oppression is not eas'd by night,
 But day by night and night by day oppress'd, 4
 And each, though enemies to other's reign,
 Do in consent shake hands to torture me,
 The one by toil, the other to complain
 How far I toil, still farther off from thee? 8
 I tell the day to please him thou art bright
 And do'st him grace when clouds do blot the heaven;
 So flatter I the swart-complexion'd night
 When sparkling stars twire not thou gild'st the even: 12
 But day doth daily draw my sorrows longer,
 And night doth nightly make grief's length seem stronger.

Typical of Shakespeare's use of the varying impact of a word to produce a spiralling emotional tone in the construction of a sonnet is the recurrence of 'heaven' in lines 3 and 12 and of 'state' in lines 2, 10 and 14 (cf. Sonnet 64, lines 9-10). The second in particular produces an effect like a change of key or a modulation in music.

1 *in disgrace*] 'out of favour'; there is no implication of shame.

6 *him . . . him*] 'this man . . . that man'; *not* = the 'one' of line 5.

7 *art*] 'skill', or 'learning', or both.

scope] range of ability, or range of opportunity, or perhaps both.

11, 12] Though the oldest text (that of 1609) prints line 11 in brackets, this cannot convey a right sense. Neither the lark nor the poet sings 'from sullen earth'. The punctuation we adopt seems to convey the meaning most clearly to the modern reader.

12 *sullen*] (1) 'dull', 'heavy'—earth was a heavy 'element', as contrasted with the light or volatile elements, air and fire. It is also contrasted with the soaring bird. But the word probably also carries the sense (2) 'sombre', in contrast with the breaking light of dawn.

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
 I all alone beweep my outcast state,
 And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
 And look upon myself and curse my fate— 4
 Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
 Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,
 Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
 With what I most enjoy contented least; 8
 Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising
 Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
 Like to the lark at break of day arising
 From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate: 12
 For thy sweet love rememb' red such wealth brings
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

1, 2 sessions . . . *summon*] 'When I sit alone and meditate on the past.' The atmosphere suggested by the language of the whole sonnet is that of an enquiry in a manorial court, presided over by Thought, the Lord of the Manor, or his Steward, into the condition of the estate, its losses and resources. Relevant words are: 'waste', 'dateless', 'cancell'd', 'expense', 'vanish'd', 'tell o'er', 'account', 'pay', 'losses', 'restor'd'. The sessions, being 'of thought', are necessarily silent.

4] This line, which we print as it is printed in the one text contemporary with Shakespeare, is admittedly ambiguous. The reader must determine for himself a number of questions the answer to any one of which may depend on the answer to another. (1) Does *dear* qualify *times* or *waste*? (2) Is *times* singular (*time's*) or plural (*times* or *times*)? (3) Is *waste* a noun or, possibly, a participle (= *wasted*)?

with] either 'by calling to mind', or 'together with'.

new wail] 'bewail afresh'. ('Woes' is not genitive; and 'wail' is a verb.)

dear] In Elizabethan English the word has several senses, some of which no single modern word adequately translates. So in *King Richard II*, I, iii, 146 'thy dear exile' is not simply 'thy grievous exile', but also implies that the homeland is dear; and in *The Tempest*, II, i, 135, when Sebastian says 'The fault's your own', and Alonso replies 'So is the dearest of the loss', 'dearest' means more than 'direst': the thing lost (his son) was most precious to him. In line 4 of the present sonnet the sense of 'dear' depends on that of 'times' and 'waste'.

dear times waste] The one really unacceptable meaning would be: 'waste of my precious time'. According to the reader's interpretation of the grammatical function and relation of the several words the possible meanings are (1) 'Time's grievous destruction of things dear', or (2) 'destruction of the best part of my life'.

6 *dateless*] 'endless'.

7 *cancell'd*] either (1) 'written off', or (2) 'receipted as fully paid'. (Either is consistent with the manorial audit image.)

8 *expense*] 'loss'.

10 *tell*] 'count'.

30

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear times waste: 4
Then can I drown an eye, unus'd to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanish'd sight: 8
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoan'd moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before. 12
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restor'd and sorrows end.

The first of a number of sonnets (Sonnets 33–6 in the 1609 Quarto) that evidently imply an estrangement between the friends.

2 *Flatter*] ‘encourage and brighten’, as the sovereign’s glance of favour would ‘flatter’ the courtier (at times delusively).

4 *alchemy*] the alchemists sought to turn ‘base’ metals into gold.

5–7 *permit . . . hide*] Both these infinitives, like ‘flatter’ in line 2, are governed by ‘have I seen’ in line 1.

basest] Probably ‘dingiest’, with a play on ‘meanest’, ‘shabbiest’.

6 *rack*] vaporous drift.

7 *fórlorn*] ‘forsaken’, ‘abandoned’, not merely ‘sad’, though sadness would certainly result.

8 *Stealing*] not primarily with *furtive*, but with *imperceptible* motion (cf. Sonnet 104, line 10). Yet the sense of furtiveness, implicit in the word, is also there. (See essay on ‘Some Characteristics of Elizabethan Vocabulary and Idiom’, at p. 149, below.)

disgrace] ‘blemish’, ‘disfigurement’—‘dis(= loss of)-grace (beauty)’. But perhaps also ‘shame’ is implied (cf. line 7).

10 *all triumphant splendour*] ‘All’ qualifies ‘splendour’—i.e. the phrase is *not* ‘all-triumphant splendour’ with a hyphen.

triumphant] ‘glorious and exulting’. ‘Victorious’ would be irrelevant.

12 *region*] ‘of the air’ (cf. *Hamlet*, II, ii, 615: ‘all the region kites’). Originally a ‘region’ in the aerial sense was any one of the layers into which the atmosphere was theoretically divided. Something dark and unworthy has come between the friends.

14 *stain*] ‘grow dim’, ‘lose brightness’.

33

*Full many a glorious morning have I seen
 Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,
 Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
 Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy, — 4
 Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
 With ugly rack on his celestial face,
 And from the fórlorn world his visage hide,
 Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace: 8
 Even so my sun one early morn did shine
 With all triumphant splendour on my brow;
 But out alack, he was but one hour mine —
 The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now. 12
 Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth:
 Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth*

The Friend has stolen the poet's mistress. The full meaning of the poem is particularly dependent on ambiguities.

1 *all my loves*] 'all the kinds of love I have'—e.g. (1) my affection for you, and (2) my mistress as well.

3 *No love*] both (1) 'No mistress' and (2) 'No affection'.

true] probably having all the following meanings: (1) 'constant', (2) 'honest', (3) 'genuine'.

love] again ambiguous.

3-4] 'You would not gain any *true* love' (in either sense of both words), 'for all my affection was yours already (and mine is the only 'true' love, hers is a false one)'. The apparently deliberate restriction of the sense of 'love' to 'affection' in 'mine' (line 4) would be a device of 'wit'.

5 *for my love*] (1) 'out of love for me'—being willing to love anything that is mine; (2) 'in place of my love for you' (preferring hers); (3) 'as being my love' (she was mine first). The last plays on the senses (a) affection, (b) object of affection.

my love receivest] 'you "receive" my mistress'—a masterly understatement.

6] 'I cannot blame you, for you are making use of my love' (with the same ambiguity as in line 1).

7-8] *this self* and *thy self*, printed as separate words in the Quarto, are often changed by editors to *thyself* . . . *thyself*. This is unnecessary. 'Self' was frequently used as a noun in Elizabethan, and particularly Shakespearean, English; and the sense here seems to be: 'Yet I do hold you guilty if you deceive me (this *alter ego* of yours) by "wilful taste" of what your own deepest self rejects.'

wilful taste of] (1) 'sexual relish for' (see 'will' in Glossary); (2) 'sexual enjoyment of', and (3) 'deliberately perverse savouring of'. All meanings seem to be present.

10 *all my poverty*] 'all the little I have'.

12 *hate's known injury*] 'that injury which we know hate is likely to give'.

14 *spites*] 'outrages'.

Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all:
 What hast thou ~~then~~ more than thou hadst before?
 No love, my love, that thou mayst true love call—
 All mine was thine, before thou hadst this more. 4
 Then if for my love thou my love receivest,
 I cannot blame thee, for my love thou usest,—
 But yet be blam'd, if thou this self deceivest
 By wilful taste of what thy self refusest. 8
 I do forgive thy robbery, gentle thief,
 Although thou steal thee all my poverty:
 And yet love knows it is a greater grief
 To bear love's wrong than hate's known injury. 12
 Lascivious grace, in whom all ill well shows,
 Kill me with spites, yet we must not be foes.

1 *dull*] 'heavy'; see note on the 'four elements', line 11, below.

2 *Injurious*] 'cruel and unjust' (cf. 'Time's injurious hand' in Sonnet 63, line 2).

3 *would be*] here meaning 'should be', not 'want to be' or 'would want to be'. Though in Shakespeare 'will' often means 'wish (to)', sometimes, though rarely, he does use 'would' for 'should'. Here he is not merely asserting that he wants (or would want) to be brought, but that he would actually *be* brought. 'Then' in lines 3 and 5 supports this.

4 *limits*] 'regions' (cf. Latin *fines*).

where] 'to where'.

6 *farthest earth remov'd*] 'earth farthest removed'.

8 *he*] i.e. thought (personified). (Not the friend.)

9] 'I am reduced to despair by reflecting that I have not the swift mobility of thought.'

11 *earth and water*] In the doctrine of the four 'elements', earth and water were considered heavy (cf. 'dull', line 1), fire and air light. The poet is largely made of earth and water—i.e. heaviness and tears; and so he cannot move like thought, which, it is implied, is air and fire.

12 *attend*] 'wait upon'.

12-14] The image appears to be that of a petitioner waiting on a great man, Time. The petitioner, composed chiefly of the 'dull' elements, is so lowly a character that all he obtains is heavy (grievous) tears; and these are insignia ('badges') of the grief of the heavy elements which prevent him from swiftly reaching his friend.

14 *either's*] not 'of the poet or the Friend', but 'of each of my two heavy elements', one of which provides the heaviness and the other the wetness of the tears.

44

*If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,
 Injurious distance should not stop my way;
 For then despite of space I would be brought
 From limits far remote where thou dost stay: 4
 No matter then although my foot did stand
 Upon the farthest earth remov'd from thee;
 For nimble thought can jump both sea and land
 As soon as think the place where he would be. 8
 But ah, thought kills me that I am not thought,
 To leap large lengths of miles when thou art gone,
 But that, so much of earth and water wrought,
 I must attend Time's leisure with my moan; 12
 Receiving naught, by elements so slow,
 But heavy tears—badges of either's woe!*

Apprehensive of the possibility of his friend's love one day cooling, Shakespeare finds strength in the consciousness of his own integrity. His friend is free to love or not to love, but can have no ground for reproach.

Two main images are used: one of the audit, 'summing the account' of relations and obligations, the other of a hand thrown off to fend off the dreaded blow of unfriendly accusations.

1 *Against*] 'In preparation for'—as in *The Taming of the Shrew*, II, i, 306: 'to buy apparel 'gainst the wedding day'.

3 *cast . . . sum*] 'cast his final reckoning' (to close his account).

4 *advis'd respects*] 'careful considerations' (of the relations that are the subject of the audit).

5 *strangely*] 'as a stranger', i.e. not acknowledging me.

6 *that sun thine eye*] The image of the sun as the eye of heaven is used also in Sonnet 18, line 5 and is implied in Sonnet 33. Here the image is, as it were, reversed.

7 *converted*] 'transformed'.

8] 'Shall find reasons for behaving with starchy solemnity.' The line continues the image ('strangely pass') of line 5.

9-14] The image is that of self-defence and taking refuge in or behind a fortification. It is often erroneously interpreted as that of a witness raising his hand in taking an oath; but the poet is not appearing as a witness, he is fortifying himself behind a sense of his own worth. He recognizes the Friend's right to leave him, but that is because there is no positive reason why the Friend should love him, not because there is any specific cause for reproach. The witness/oath interpretation would contradict lines 9 and 10.

9 *ensconce me*] 'shelter myself' (as within or behind a fortification).

11 *against*] here the word means 'in front of': he raises his hand as explained in line 12 (where *guard* means to 'parry' or 'ward off' his friend's attack).

12 *lawful reasons*] 'reasons given as if you were arguing in a court of law' (not necessarily, and here not at all, valid reasons).

13-14] The opposition is between 'leave' and 'love', as the alliteration and dissonance between the words emphasize.

Against that time (if ever that time come)
 When I shall see ~~thee~~ frown on my defects,
 Whenas thy love hath cast his utmost sum,
 Call'd to that audit by advis'd respects: 4
 Against that time when thou shalt strangely pass
 And scarcely greet me with that sun thine eye,
 When love converted from the thing it was
 Shall reasons find of settled gravity: 8
 Against that time do I ensconce me here
 Within the knowledge of mine own desert,
 And this my hand against myself uprear
 To guard the lawful reasons on thy part. 12
 To leave poor me thou hast the strength of laws,
 Since why to love I can allege no cause.

The poet's love for his friend is a precious jewel which he can treasure in secret; but like such treasures he can enjoy it the more by not having the object perpetually in front of him. Three sets of associations blend to give body to the poem: (1) possessiveness on the part of the poet, suggested by 'sweet up-locked treasure' (line 2), 'keeps you' and 'chest' (line 9), 'wardrobe' and 'hide' (line 10), 'imprison'd pride' (line 12), and 'had' (line 14); (2) calculated hedonism (i.e. pleasure-seeking) particularly expressed in 'fine point of . . . pleasure' (line 4); and, closely associated with this, (3) festal pageantry, as in 'feasts . . . solemn . . . rare' (line 5), the jewelled 'carcanet' (line 8), the 'pride' (line 12) of the 'wardrobe' (line 10), and 'triumph' (line 14); (4) almost religious veneration for the Friend, implied in 'blessèd' (lines 1 and 13), 'special instant special blest' (line 11), and 'worthiness' (line 13).

1 *So am I as*] 'I am exactly like.'

key] This would at that time rhyme with 'survey' in line 3—being pronounced 'kay' (cf. modern 'grey', 'whey', etc.).

3 *will not*] 'does not want to'.

4 *For blunting*] 'Lest it blunt.' Cf. *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, I, ii, 133: 'Yet here they shall not lie, for catching cold'.

seldom] here an adjective: 'infrequently occurring'.

5 *solemn*] 'formal', 'ceremonious', in a joyful sense we have now lost. The word emphasizes the double association in 'rare'.

8 *captain*] 'chief', 'principal' (Late Latin *capitanus*).

carcanet] an ornamental collar or necklace, usually of gold and sometimes set with jewels.

9 *So is . . . as*] The same construction as in line 1. ('As' goes with 'so' and not with 'keeps'.)

keeps] 'withholds', 'detains', bearing first the sense 'imprisons', which subsequently changes to 'treasures up' (in the chest). Cf. 'imprison'd pride' in line 12.

12 *imprison'd pride*] Primarily 'its imprisoned splendour'; but possibly with a play on 'the pride of (= the best thing in) the wardrobe'.

14 *triumph*] 'exultant joy'.

So am I as the rich whose blessed key
 Can bring him to his sweet up-locked treasure,
 The which he will not every hour survey,
 For blunting the fine point of seldom pleasure. 4
 Therefore are feasts so solemn and so rare,
 Since, seldom coming, in the long year set
 Like stones of worth they thinly placèd are,
 Or captain jewels in the carcanet. 8
 So is the time that keeps you as my chest,
 Or as the wardrobe which the robe doth hide,
 To make some special instant special blest
 By new unfolding his imprison'd pride. 12
 Blessèd are you whose worthiness gives scope
 Being had, to triumph; being lack'd, to hope.

Shakespeare sometimes, as here, draws on the philosophical vocabulary of his time without exploiting it with technical precision.

1 *substance*] One philosophical meaning of the word was 'essential nature'. Another was 'matter'. But Shakespeare is probably using the term in a comprehensive sense including either or both of these meanings and also (3) 'wealth' (the Friend has many attendant shadows) and/or (4) 'solid quality of mind or character'.

2 *strange*] i.e. not your own. But possibly also vague—for in one sense they *must* be his!

shadows] cf. line 4: presumably in neither case *umbræ* (which lack colour, texture, detail), but *imagines* (see line 5, below).

3 *every one . . . every one*] 'Every entity (e.g. person, object, phenomenon (line 9)) has its individual and unique shadow.' The repetition is not merely idle.

shade] *umbra* or *imago*? or neither precisely? It is hard to say.

4] 'And you, although only one-person, can supply an image for every sort of excellence.'

lend] 'supply'.

5 *counterfeit*] 'picture', 'portrait'. (Cf. *Merchant of Venice*, III, ii, 115: 'What have we here? Fair Portia's counterfeit.') Not 'description' but the picture called up by it.

8 *tires*] If the portrait is of a head only, 'headgear'. But if it is full length, possibly 'attire'. The former is the more usual Elizabethan sense.

new] 'afresh', 'yet again'.

9 *spring . . . foison*] The 'spring' is freshness and vitality, the 'foison' abundance of produce. The antithesis is more than just one of spring/autumn as seasons. It contrasts their active characterizing properties.

12] 'And we recognize you in every fine form.'

13] Not 'you share in every external beauty', but 'every external beauty partakes of you'. The sense is probably Platonic.

14] 'But in the matter of constancy you are like no one else, and no one else is a match for you.'

53

*What is your substance, whereof are you made,
 That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
 Since every one hath, every one, one shade,
 And you, but one, can every shadow lend: 4
 Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
 Is poorly imitated after you;
 On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
 And you in Grecian tires are painted new: 8
 Speak of the spring and foison of the year,—
 The one doth shadow of your beauty show,
 The other as your bounty doth appear;
 And you in every blessed shape we know: 12
 In all external grace you have some part,
 But you like none, none you, for constant heart.*

The differentiating quality of the Friend was seen in Sonnet 53 to be 'constancy of heart', and the present sonnet continues that thought.

2 *truth*] Probably simply 'fidelity', cf. Sonnet 53, line 14.

5 *canker blooms*] not 'cankered (i.e. worm-eaten) blossoms', but the blossoms of the 'canker' or dog-rose. (Elizabethan garden roses had not the intense colours of modern hybrids.)

6 *tincture*] 'colour' (cf. 'dye', line 5), not 'alchemical quintessence'. The emphasis is on *perfumed*. Nature the artist has given both roses colour, which fades when either dies; but to the garden rose has added scent, which may be preserved.

8 *discloses*] 'opens up'.

9 *for*] 'because'.

only is] 'lies wholly in'.

10 *unrespected*] 'without any attention being paid to them'.

11 *to themselves*] 'without affecting anything but themselves'.

13 *lovely*] not just 'handsome', but 'lovable', 'worthy of deep affection'.

14 *that*] 'your beauty', referring to the former of the two qualities just mentioned; as the second half of line 14 refers to the latter of the two, lovableness.

vade] 'vanish away': *vade* is the spelling in the oldest text, and there is no need for editors to change it to *fade*, as many have done. In Elizabethan English 'vade' was a word distinct from 'fade', and often meant 'vanish'. For this sense of *vade* cf. 'As the wax *vadeth and consumeth* in the fire, so shall all sinners perish before the face of God' (T. Becon, 1563). This gives a stronger meaning, which is here more apt than simply 'fade'.

by . . . distils] 'distils' is here intransitive, meaning 'undergoes distillation (into a fine essence)'. This sense fits perfectly, and it is therefore unnecessary to regard 'distils' as transitive, as some editors have done, consequently changing *by* to *my*.

Oh how much more doth beauty beauteous seem
 By that sweet ornament which truth doth give!
 The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
 For that sweet odour which doth in it live. 4
 The canker blooms have full as deep a dye
 As the perfumèd tincture of the roses,
 Hang on such thorns and play as wantonly
 When summer's breath their maskèd buds discloses: 8
 But for their virtue only is their show
 They live unwoo'd and unrespected fade—
 Die to themselves. Sweet roses do not so;
 Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made: 12.
 And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,
 When that shall vade, by verse distils your truth.

Defiance of Time, and the boast of the immortality verse alone can confer, have been a frequent theme of poets since Classical times, and we find it in the French and English sonneteers alike. The most celebrated Classical exemplars are Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, xv, 871:

ianque opus exegi quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis
nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas.

and Horace, *Odes*, III, xxx, 1-5:

exegi monumentum aere perennius
regalique situ pyramidum altius.

2 *this powerful rhyme*] Shakespeare is not praising his own poetry as 'powerful' beyond that of others, but acclaiming the power of poetry in general. (Cf. Latin *isti versus potentes*.)

3 *these contents*] probably either 'the contents of my poems about you', or just 'my poems about you', rather than 'this sonnet in particular'.

4 *unswept stone*] i.e. a neglected monument. Meticulous care and cleaning of tombs and monuments seems to be a distinctively modern practice.

5 *wasteful*] 'destructive' (*not* 'extravagant').

6 *masonry*] the art or skill; not the fabric, which has already been named in 'work'.

7 *Nor . . . sword*] the omission of the verb (whose subject is 'sword') is a typical Shakespearean ellipsis.

Mars his] An Elizabethan genitive form, often wrongly believed to be the original and correct English inflection. Commonest after proper names, especially those ending in '-s' or '-ce', it may have originated in a confusion between the '-s' or '-es' inflection and the possessive adjective or pronoun when spoken with the 'h' suppressed.

quick] literally 'lively', and therefore here 'fierce'.

9 *all oblivious enmity*] 'all hostile forces bringing things to oblivion'. There is no need for the common insertion of a hyphen between the first two words.

10 *pace forth*] 'stride on', not needing to dodge the enemies.

praise] 'glory'.

still] 'always'.

find room] i.e. it will not need to jostle for a place.

12 *wear this world out*] 'will last as long as this world' (which posterity as a whole will do).

13 *judgment*] i.e. the Last Judgment.

55

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
 Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
 But you shall shine more bright in these contents
 Than unswept stone besmear'd with sluttish time. 4
 When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
 And broils root out the work of masonry,
 Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
 The living record of your memory. 8
 'Gainst death and all oblivious enmity
 Shall you pace forth: your praise shall still find room
 Even in the eyes of all posterity
 That wear this world out to the ending doom. 12
 So, till the judgment that yourself arise,
 You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

A touch of 'love's sad satiety' has crept into the relationship between poet and Friend. Whether this results from an actual cause of estrangement or from a period of apathy, it is impossible to say. Mere physical absence, as through the travel mentioned in other sonnets, does not appear to have weakened the poet's affection in any way.

1 *Sweet love*] It is the feeling, not the God of Love personified, nor the friend, that is appealed to.

3 *but*] 'only for'—a sharp contrast with the 'Tomorrow' of line 4.

6 *wink*] 'close', in the sleep of repletion.

7 *see*] i.e. 'open your eyes, and see'.

7-8 *do . . . dulness*] 'do not make the animating spirit of love wither away by keeping it' (or 'by yourself remaining') 'in a perpetual torpor'.

9 *sad interim*] 'heavy period of apathy'. Though 'sad' primarily means here 'torpid' or 'heavy', no doubt it implies also 'sorrowful'.

9-12] Taking 'shore' as = 'land' in general, which the seas divide, the arrival would perhaps be comparable to the arrival nowadays of a mail-boat eagerly awaited by the lovers on their respective 'banks' (i.e. 'shores' in the narrower sense). The situation is similar to that of Hero and Leander, on whom Marlowe's poem was written before 1593—so that it may have been in Shakespeare's mind.

10 *contracted new*] 'newly betrothed'.

13 *As*] Probably meaning 'As one might'. This is the 1609 Quarto reading. Almost all modern editions print *Or*, following the change made by some eighteenth-century editors.

it] i.e. the 'sad interim' of line 9.

14] The welcome we give to summer is the more splendid *because* we have so much longed to give it. ('Rare' = 'splendid', not 'uncommon'.) There might be a sense of pageantry celebrating the outgoing of Winter and the welcoming of Summer, the seasons being personified.

Sweet love, renew they force; be it not said
 Thy edge should blunter be than appetite,
 Which but today by feeding is allay'd,
 Tomorrow sharpen'd in his former might: 4
 So, love, be thou; although today thou fill
 Thy hungry eyes even till they wink with fulness,
 Tomorrow see again, and do not kill
 The spirit of love with a perpetual dulness: 8
 Let this sad interim like the ocean be
 Which parts the shore where two contracted new
 Come daily to the banks, that when they see
 Return of love more blest may be the view: 12
 As call it Winter, which being full of care
 Makes Summer's welcome, thrice more wish'd, more rare.

The idea that at intervals the course of the world exactly repeats itself occurs frequently in ancient speculation. Just how complete the similarity was, in the recurrent repetitions, was a matter of dispute; and this may be reflected in lines 11 and 12 of this sonnet, though Shakespeare would probably have met this dispute in general intellectual gossip rather than through any direct knowledge of philosophic writings. In any case, the immediate source of the idea with which the poem opens was probably the biblical quotation echoed in lines 1-2. This also has a parallel in Marcus Aurelius's saying: 'There is nothing new under the sun.'

Astronomically the Great Year was the period (variously reckoned) after which all the heavenly bodies were supposed to return to their original positions. To those who believed in stellar influence on human affairs this would naturally seem to cause a corresponding recurrence in human affairs. The periods assigned to the Great Year included 540 years and 600 years, as well as far longer periods. On these smaller estimates, if a cycle were in measurable distance of its end, a regression of 500 (see line 6, below) would put the world back into a previous cycle.

1-2] The parallel with *Eccles*, i, 9-10 is often pointed out.

3 *invention*] The first of the five processes of Rhetoric, 'the finding out of apt matter. . . '.

amiss] The word 'amiss' could then mean 'short or wide of a mark or objective' (cf. Caxton: 'Our Archyers shet neuer arowe amys.') The sense would then be: 'We travail to produce something new, but fail to do so, and only reproduce material from past worlds.'

8] 'Written at any time since men first expressed thought in writing.'

10 *composed wonder*] 'Impeccably proportioned miracle.'

frame] 'form', rather than merely bone-structure or even build.

11 *mended*] 'amended', i.e. an improvement on men of that time.

where] The word was frequently contracted into something between a monosyllable and a disyllable, the rhythmic effect being somewhat similar to that of the elisions we indicate with a slur (see note on p. 11). We print it here as in the 1609 text.

12] i.e. or whether recurrence (from cycle to cycle) involves complete qualitative similarity.

13 *wits*] 'able men', men of understanding and 'invention' (cf. line 3).

14 *admiring*] 'wondering'.

13-14] Probably an intentionally ironic understatement; otherwise the ending would be ineffably banal.

*If there be nothing new, but that which is
 Hath been before, how are our brains beguil'd,
 Which labouring for invention bear amiss
 The second burthen of a former child! 4
 Oh that record could with a backward look
 Even of five hundred courses of the sun
 Show me your image in some antique book
 Since mind at first in character was done! — 8
 That I might see what the old world could say
 To this composèd wonder of your frame,
 Whether we are mended, or whe'er better they,
 Or whether revolution be the same. 12
 Oh sure I am the wits of former days
 To subjects worse have given admiring praise.*

A characteristic Shakespearean image progression marks the sonnet. There is no one 'conceit' that is developed with logical coherence, unifying the poem with one completed image. Instead, a word, an imaginative or emotional association, is sufficient to project a new image of quite different, even logically disparate quality. The incoming tide of the first quatrain is displaced by a crawling infant, who in turn gives way to a sun-image in 'eclipses', which again yields place to a militant adversary, Time, who throws darts, digs trenches in beauty's brow, eats beauty as a canker-worm eats buds, and ends as the eternal reaper with his scythe. Yet there is a strong emotional harmony beneath these divergent images. All are images of slow devouring movement or of scarcely perceptible motion towards the progress that is defied in the final couplet.

1 *pebbled*] A rocky shore would not provide the desired image; it would not suggest the gentle and imperceptible 'making' tide.

4 *contend*] Not here implying *competition*. 'All press forward, one after another, in steady succession.'

5 *Nativity*] Shakespeare often uses abstract for concrete. So 'Nativity' means first a new-born infant, and leads to one association of 'crawls' (line 6). But it also suggests the astrological sense of the moment of birth in relation to the conjunction of planets and their position in the Twelve Houses of the Zodiac, and so the imagery moves from the sea to the heavens, from water to light, and so to the sun and its eclipses (line 7).

main] 'broad expanse'—a transference of usage from the primary sense 'main sea'. 'Main of light' thus implies for the child its independent existence. But to an Elizabethan it would also suggest the hollow sphere of the universe filled with light, as contrasted with the 'main of waters'. It is this sense, no doubt, that led Shakespeare to that of 'full day', involving the sun at its height (line 6), and so to the 'eclipses' of line 7, as noted above.

7 *Crookèd*] malignant.

8 *confound*] destroy.

9 *transfix the flourish*] A 'flourish' originally meant a blossom, and hence a 'bloom' (as on fruit), thence it came to mean also a gloss, a varnish, or showy laid-on ornament. (*Twelfth Night*, III, iv, 404 tells us 'the beauteous evil/Are empty trunks o'erflourish'd by the devil'; and, for the converse, there are in Shakespeare numerous references to beauty that is 'in grain'.) There may, indeed, in 'the flourish set on youth', be a secondary hint at the fact that the Elizabethan gallant painted—sometimes pretty thick.

'Transfix' is recorded nowhere, except in reference to this line, with any meaning

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
 So do our minutes hasten to their end;
 Each changing place with that which goes before
 In sequent toil all forwards do contend. 4
 Nativity, once in the main of light,
 Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
 Crookèd eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
 And Time that gave doth now his gift confound. 8
 Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,
 And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,
 Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth;
 And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow. 12
 And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,
 Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

Another Time-defying protestation: compare Sonnets 55 and 60.

1 *Against*] 'In preparation for the time when. . . ' This meaning, frequent in Shakespeare, is taken up by 'For' in line 9.

2 *injurious*] more than 'destructive' or 'harmful'—unjustly or wrongfully so.

crush'd and o'erwarn] The image is probably that of a cloth whose nap is worn away: as in 'A beaten-out pulpit cushion, an oreworn Communion-cloth' (J. Weever, *Ancient Funeral Monuments*, 1631).

5 *travail'd*] So spelt in the 1609 edition, though most modern editors change this to 'travell'd'. As noted in the Introduction, the spellings were interchangeable in Elizabethan English. Shakespeare, even when he intends the journey to be primary, often suggests the toil involved. Indeed, the two words were originally the same, and Elizabethan English is much nearer to 'origins' than our own. Here the modern spelling *travell'd* might obliterate the suggestion of toil, while *travail'd* does not obliterate the sense of journey.

steepy night] Age plunges into dotage and oblivion as the sun to its setting.

8 *Stealing*] We of today have lost so much of the vital sense of many common words that we may easily overlook the element of secrecy in 'steal' = 'take dishonestly and secretly'. Compare the converse movement in our sense of 'furtive', where we may forget that Latin *fur* means 'a thief', and that that gives us the word 'furtive'. The Romans themselves, indeed, used the adjective *furtivus* in two senses (1) 'stolen', (2) 'secret', 'concealed'. Shakespeare's diction retains that vitality we are in danger of losing, and the sense of imperceptible removal is definitely present here.

spring] Though the 1609 Quarto spells this with a capital, to do so in a modern text would *confine* the sense to the season. But 'spring' (without the capital) could still, at least until the mid-seventeenth century, mean 'young growth' and its freshness, and that meaning seems also present here.

fortify] an intransitive verb = 'raise defence works', as in *King Henry IV, Part 2*, I, iii, 56: 'We fortify in papers and in figures.'

10 *confounding*] 'destroying' (as in Sonnet 60, line 8).

11, 12] i.e. the beauty of him I love will never be forgotten, though he will no longer live to love me.

13 *black lines*] 'Black' is not *only* the black of ink. Its associations of ugliness, night, death and oblivion establish a paradox: it is in these 'black lines' of verse, in contrast with the 'lines' of age in line 4, that beauty and freshness will be preserved. Some readers might even be tempted to stress the word 'these', though that would destroy the effect by its very heaviness,

Against my love shall be as I am now,
 With Time's injurious hand crush'd and o'erworn;
 When hours have drain'd his blood and fill'd his brow
 With lines and wrinkles; when his youthful morn 4
 Hath travail'd on to age's steepy night,
 And all those beauties whereof now he's king
 Are vanishing or vanish'd out of sight,
 Stealing away the treasure of his spring: 8
 For such a time do I now fortify.
 Against confounding age's cruel knife,
 That he shall never cut from memory
 My sweet love's beauty, though my lover's life: 12
 His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,
 And they shall live, and he in them still green.

Most of the other sonnets dealing with Time's destructiveness end on a note of hope that defies Time by the thought of procreation or of the immortalizing power of verse. This sonnet, by contrast, ends on a note of tragic despair, through which possession itself destroys enjoyment of the thing possessed.

2] Though the words ('rich'—'cost': 'outworn'—'buried') seem repetitive, the effect is of accumulating weight of meaning. The verbal richness includes (a) 'proud', meaning (1) 'displaying pride' or 'in which pride is taken', and (2) 'showy' (as in Sonnet 2, line 3); and (b) 'cost', meaning (1) 'expense', and (2) 'ornament and display'. Though some editors hyphenate 'rich-proud', this weakens the line by simplification of these effects.

3 *sometime*] 'once' (not 'sometimes'), modifying 'lofty'.

down raz'd] The hyphen usually inserted by modern editors ('down-raz'd') is unnecessary.

4 *brass eternal*] The adjective 'eternal' qualifies 'brass', not 'slave'. (Cf. Horace *Odes*, III, xxx, 1, *aere perennius*.) The reference in this sonnet is to monumental brasses and their inscriptions.

'mortal rage' i.e. death's ravage (cf. Sonnet 65, line 3, note) and destructive fury; but there is a half-realized antithesis between 'mortal' and 'eternal', which the construction (noun-adjective: adjective-noun) aptly suggests. Through the sharp contrast with 'mortal' the word 'eternal' ironically derides human beings' vain attempts to ensure that they be remembered by posterity.

5-6 *gain/Advantage*] i.e. make inroads by erosion.

9-10 *state . . . state*] There is a characteristically Shakespearean play on the word as meaning (1) 'condition', (2) 'territory', (3) (in line 10) 'worldly grandeur'.

10 *confounded to decay*] 'decay' is best read as a noun, nearer to the root meaning 'toppling down' (Mediaeval Latin *decadere* = 'to topple'). The comma often inserted ('confounded, to decay') gives a meaning in which decay follows destruction, and this seems weaker.

13 *which*] referring to 'thought', not to 'death'.

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defac'd
The rich proud cost of outworn buried age;
When sometime lofty towers I see down raz'd,
And brass eternal slave to mortal rage; 4
When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
And the firm soil win of the watery main,
Increasing store with loss and loss with store: 8
When I have seen such interchange of state,
Or state itself confounded to decay,
Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminatè —
That Time will come and take my love away. 12
This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

1] For syntax some such phrase as 'there is' must be understood. Ellipsis of 'It is', 'there is' and 'is' is quite common in Shakespeare.

2 *sad mortality*] 'calamitous destruction' (not 'sorrowful mortals'!).

3 *rage*] 'destructive fury' or 'violence' (as in *Cymbeline*, IV, ii, 258: 'fear no more the heat o' the sun./Nor the furious winter's rages').

hold a plea] 'sustain a plea', a legal phrase.

4 *action*] 'power of action' or 'vitality'. There is, however, a pun on a legal 'action' (cf. 'hold a plea', line 3), though the image passes at once to that of the siege of lines 6-8 below.

6 *wreckful*] 'destructive'.

8 *time*] we delay the use of a capital (nowhere used in this sonnet for 'time' in the 1609 Quarto) until line 10, as we feel that the personification, though it may be incipient here, is not completed until then.

9 *fearful*] a word to be taken in its strongest sense: today it is often used much more weakly.

10 *Time's chest*] It may superficially seem inconsistent of Shakespeare to speak of *hiding* a jewel *from* a chest; but the image is of a jewel that Time lends us to enjoy for a period, and that we would like to hide from him, while he is eager to take it back to his treasure-chest. 'Chest' probably also carries a secondary association of the coffin and the grave. (Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*, III, iii, 145-6 speaks of Time's 'wallet . . . in which he puts alms for oblivion'.)

12 *spoil*] primarily (1) 'plundering', but the well-chosen word also involves the sense (2) 'injury'. Time will not merely carry off the friend but will also damage his beauty.

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
 But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
 How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
 Whose action is no stronger than a flower? 4
 Oh how shall summer's honey breath hold out
 Against the wrackful siege of battering days,
 When rocks impregnable are not so stout
 Nor gates of steel so strong but time decays? 8
 Oh fearful meditation! where, alack,
 Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
 Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
 Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid? 12
 Oh none, unless this miracle have might—
 That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

The structure of this poem is entirely different from the generality of Shakespeare's sonnets. There is no octave/sestet division. The theme is given a general enunciation in the first line; the next twelve expand this with particulars in parallel wordings; and the couplet, recapitulating the first line, closes the poem with a poignant affirmation of the poet's one attachment to life.

We have printed each personification with a capital letter. The 1609 edition does this for some only, but with no apparent system.

1 *these*] the evils enumerated in the ensuing lines.

3 *needy Nothing*] a personification of 'worthless creatures of no gifts or qualities'. There is no implication of social pity extended to the 'worthy poor': the antithesis is to 'Desert' in line 2. 'Nothing', as applied to persons, is a strong term in Elizabethan English.

trimm'd] 'dressed'.

jollity] 'fine (pretty) clothes'.

4 *unhappily*] Either 'disastrously', or, more probably, in view of 'shamefully' in line 5, 'maliciously'.

forsworn] as the victim, not the perjurer.

5 *Honour . . . misplac'd*] 'Rank or dignity shamefully ill-conferred.' Cf. *Eccles.* x, 5-6: 'There is an evil . . . which proceedeth from the ruler: Folly is set in great dignity.'

6 *strumpeted*] The sense 'falsely debased with the reputation of a strumpet' gives a closer parallel to line 7 than would 'prostituted'.

7 *right*] 'true', 'genuine'.

disgrac'd] 'cheated of reputation', 'disparaged', rather than 'deprived of favours', which is a less common sense in Shakespeare.

8 *by limping sway*] 'by the weak and uncertain rule of those in power'.

disabl'd] 'prevented from exercising its ability'. The word has here four syllables. In Elizabethan English 'liquids' following a consonant were frequently pronounced as an extra syllable.

9 *Art*] Certainly not in the modern sense ('the Fine Arts'); probably here 'learning and science'.

9-10] 'learning and science are silenced by those in authority, and stupid ignorance, giving itself the airs of an expert, controls and directs the really knowledgeable people'. Some scholars have thought that line 9 may refer to state restrictions on the freedom of the press, by the licensing laws and the jurisdiction of the Star Chamber.

11 *Truth*] 'Straightforwardness', 'Honesty', (not 'facts').

Tir'd with all these for restful death I cry,—
 As to behold Desert a beggar born,
 And needy Nothing trimm'd in jollity,
 And purest Faith unhappily forsworn, 4
 And gilded Honour shamefully misplac'd,
 And maiden Virtue rudely strumpeted,
 And right Perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,
 And Strength by limping Sway disabled, 8
 And Art made tongue-tied by Authority,
 And Folly, Doctor-like, controlling Skill,
 And simple Truth miscall'd Simplicity,
 And captive Good attending captain Ill: 12
 Tir'd with all these, from these I would be gone—
 Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.

miscall'd] 'slandered as': the word is stronger than 'misnamed'.

Simplicity] 'Naivety', 'Simplemindedness'.

12 *captain*] Either 'dominant' or, if a noun used attributively, 'his overlord'.

14 *to die*] i.e. 'if I die'.

alone] probably both (1) 'simply that', and (2) 'without me'.

True beauty, as 'borne' by the Friend, is contrasted with the cosmetic shams that were fashionable and that Shakespeare hated. Nature has kept the Friend's beauty untainted to show the world what uncorrupted beauty used to be.

1 *the map . . . outworn*] 'the very picture or image of past times'.

2 *as flowers do now*] i.e. unpainted, in their natural hues.

3 *these bastard signs of fair*] 'these false semblances of beauty'—i.e. the cosmetics that Shakespeare loathed.

fair] Shakespeare several times uses the word as a noun.

borne] Although the Quarto spelling used here is sometimes changed by editors to *born*, that obscures one sense of the deliberately ambiguous word. 'Carried' or 'worn' is the primary sense; 'born' is only the echo from 'bastard'. The differentiation of spelling does not arise until the late eighteenth century.

5-7] Wigs and artificial coiffures were often made from hair shorn from corpses. Characteristically, as with cosmetics, Shakespeare disapproves of these pretentious accessories. (Cf. *The Merchant of Venice*, III, ii, 92 ff.)

10 *it self*] 'It' refers to beauty; 'self' is adjectival, as today in the description of colours (especially of flowers)—and of whisky—and means 'the same throughout', 'consistent'. To print the word as *itself* would obscure the syntax.

Actually, 'self' was, in the earliest times, primarily an adjective agreeing with a preceding pronoun. Quite early it came to be looked on as a noun, and the pronouns assumed the possessive form, as in 'yourself', 'myself'. Inconsistently, this was not accepted for the third person, and 'hissel', 'theirselves' are today either dialectal or 'ungrammatical'. In the case of 'it', whose possessive was 'his' ('its', which does not occur in any Shakespearean quarto of play or poem, is very rare in print before 1600), this lack of acceptance is particularly evident, in that 'itself' was almost always printed as two words. We have retained this old convention for the reason of syntactical clarity given above.

Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn
 When beauty lived and died as flowers do now,
 Before these bastard signs of fair were borne,
 Or durst inhabit on a living brow: 4
 Before the golden tresses of the dead,
 The right of sepulchres, were shorn away
 To live a second life on second head:
 Ere beauty's dead fleece made another gay. 8
 In him those holy antique hours are seen
 Without all ornament, it self and true,
 Making no summer of another's green,
 Robbing no old to dress his beauty new: 12
 And him as for a map doth Nature store,
 To show false Art what beauty was of yore.

The Friend is reproached for laying himself open to slanderous gossip.

1-2] 'Your outward qualities are so perfect that the deepest thought could not conceive them better.' ('Want' = 'lack'; 'mend' = 'improve upon'.)

3 *due*] Emended by the great eighteenth-century scholar Edward Capell from the 1609 Quarto's *end*. The rhyme requires emendation in any case.

4 *even so as*] 'in the same way as' (i.e. by giving no more than your due).

5 *outward*] a noun, 'exterior'.

outward praise] Clearly involving word-play: (1) 'praise of your exterior', (2) 'publicly spoken praise', (3) 'superficial praise' (cf. line 11). It is also just possible that the similarity in Elizabethan pronunciation of 'outward' and 'uttered' might accentuate the play on sense (2).

11] There are probably two concurrent meanings: (1) 'Then, in contrast to their eyes, which rightly told them that you were handsome, their nasty minds interpret your actions churlishly'; and (2) 'Though they gave you very friendly looks, they were thinking about you quite differently.'

12 *the rank smell of weeds*] i.e. an unsavoury reputation.

14 *soil*] The most probable emendation, we believe, of the 1609 Quarto's *solye*, the meaning being 'explanation'. Many other emendations have been offered, the most usual being *solve*; and a certainly possible reading, once proposed by Professor Dover Wilson: *sully*. But *soyle* was then a usual spelling of 'soil'.

thou dost common grow] 'you are being too familiar with all and sundry'.

Those parts of thee that the world's eye doth view
 Want nothing that the thought of hearts can mend;
 All tongues (the voice of souls) give thee that due,
 Uttering bare truth, even so as foes commend: 4
 Thine outward thus with outward praise is crown'd;
 But those same tongues that give thee so thine own
 In other accents do this praise confound
 By seeing farther than the eye hath shown: 8
 They look into the beauty of thy mind,
 And that, in guess, they measure by thy deeds;
 Then, churls, their thoughts, although their eyes were kind,
 To thy fair flower add the rank smell of weeds. 12
 But why thy odour matcheth not thy show,
 The soil is this—that thou dost common grow.

The poet attempts a defence of his friend's reputation on the ground that merit and virtue will always be the targets for slander.

1] Note that the poet writes 'shall not be', not 'is', and so implies: 'I refuse to take the slander at its face value.'

2 *mark*] 'target'.

3 *suspect*] a noun = 'suspicion', in apposition to 'crow' in line 4. 'Suspect' is never used by Shakespeare as an adjective or past participle.

3] i.e. The attachment of suspicion is really the distinguishing embellishment of beauty.

4] The crow being regarded as a filthy bird, and a bird of the devil.

5 *So*] 'provided that', a common use at the time.

approve] 'prove'—the object of the verb is 'worth' in the next line.

5-8] The sense seems to be: 'If you really are good, slander will only show your worth to be all the greater, if time is showering all its gifts on you; for it is the finest buds that are most likely to harbour the canker-worm, and you have already revealed yourself as a newly-opened flower without defect'. Taking this to be the meaning of these admittedly difficult lines, the numerous emendations proposed for *woo'd of time* (i.e. 'time showers its gifts on you') appear to us unnecessary.

10 *assail'd*] 'exposed to temptations'.

charg'd] 'attacked'.

11-12] 'The beast malice, that praise of you cannot tether securely, is always being newly set at liberty.'

12 *To*] 'as to'.

enlarg'd] 'set at liberty' (cf. *King Henry V*, II, i, 40: 'Enlarge the man committed yesterday').

13 *suspect*] a noun, as in line 3.

thy show] 'the appearance you would otherwise present to "the world's eye"'

14 *owe*] 'own', 'possess'. The couplet may be paraphrased: 'If your true appearance were not partly obscured by some suspicion of evil, then you would be unique (cf. lines 2 and 11-12) in having absolute sovereignty over whole kingdoms of hearts'.

That thou art blam'd shall not be thy defect,
 For slander's mark was ever yet the fair:
 The ornament of beauty is suspect—
 A crow that flies in heaven's sweetest air. 4
 So thou be good, slander doth but approve
 Thy worth the greater, being woo'd of time;
 For canker vice the sweetest buds doth love,
 And thou present'st a pure unstain'd prime: 8
 Thou hast pass'd by the ambush of young days
 Either not assail'd, or victor being charg'd;
 Yet this thy praise cannot be so thy praise
 To tie up envy, evermore enlarg'd: 12
 If some suspect of ill mask'd not thy show
 Then thou alone kingdoms of hearts shouldst owe.

A sonnet where Shakespeare's characteristic treatment is particularly evident—the dragging sonority of the first quatrain, attuned to its theme; the gentle pathos, freer flow and lighter stresses of the contrasted second quatrain; the interweaving of these threads in the third quatrain to reach an apparent yet not really final conclusion, and the final couplet that takes all that has gone before and not only resolves but supplements it.

It is unwise of a modern reader to speak of the contrasting effects of vowel sounds in Shakespeare (e.g. between the first and second quatrains) as if they were always spoken exactly as today. Shakespeare certainly attached very different noises to 'mourn', 'dead', 'vile' and 'world' from those we now make. But despite big changes in the *actual sound* of different vowels, there can remain strong *contrasts* (e.g. between 'back' and 'front' vowels, 'open' and 'closed') and interplay of vowel and consonant. *Mutatis mutandis* these interplays may be seen richly present in this sonnet.

2 *surly sullen bell*] The tolling of a passing bell is now virtually obsolete in most parts of England—often omitted at the funeral itself, and very seldom heard to 'give warning . . . that X is fled'.

4 *vildest*] An old form of 'vilest', which we retain from old editions for its heavier quality as better fitting the line.

7 *sweet thoughts*] probably 'the thoughts thought by you who are sweet'.

8 *make you woe*] 'make woe for you', 'cause you woe' ('woe' is not an adjective).

11] 'Never even utter my name again.'

12 *even with*] 'at the same time as'.

decay] 'cease to exist'.

13 *wise*] 'wiseacre'.

14] 'And taunt you after my death with having loved such a fellow as me.'

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
 Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
 Give warning to the world that I am fled
 From this vile world with vildest worms to dwell: 4
 Nay, if you read this line, remember not
 The hand that writ it, for I love you so
 That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot
 If thinking on me then should make you woe. 8
 Oh if, I say, you look upon this verse
 When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
 Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
 But let your love even with my life decay; 12
 Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
 And mock you with me after I am gone.

2 or none, or few] The comma after *none*, inserted by the great eighteenth-century Shakespearean scholar Edward Capell, gives the slow line a somewhat hesitant movement reflecting a brooding and unsettled mind unable to rest on one definite image.

3 *shake against the cold*] i.e. 'shake as the cold threatens' (in the autumn gales).

4 *Bare ruin'd choirs*] This is the (now universally accepted) reading of the 1640 edition (though there spelt *quires*) whereas the 1609 Quarto had *Bare rn'wd quiers*. If the shift of imagery from 'boughs that shake' to the solid masonry of ruined abbey choirs seems violent and inconsistent, it should be remembered that Shakespeare commonly passes from image to image without troubling about strict logical coherence. Cf. Macbeth's 'Tomorrow, and tomorrow' speech (V, v, 18 ff.) or his soliloquy on sleep (II, ii, 36 ff.), and, among the Sonnets, no. 60.

8 *seals up*] It is impossible to decide whether the metaphor is (1) of enclosing in a coffin, or (2) of stitching up the eyes of a hawk (usually spelt 'seel', but frequently 'seal' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries).

12 *with*] either (1) 'by' or (2) 'simultaneously with', or perhaps even both. A flame lives on the volatilization of the fuel (e.g. wood, coal, oil), and when that substance is itself consumed there is no more to become the flame that consumes it. Indeed, the ashes themselves may choke the fire which, when they were fuel, they nourished.

9-12] The leaping flame of youth has died down to a quiescent glow, which seems to live on the ashes of the man's past and its vigour; and this itself will ultimately fade out completely when the last trace of bodily vitality is exhausted. Note how in each quatrain Shakespeare not only delineates an autumnal, twilight, or just glowing present, but also foreshadows a winter, night, or extinction, in a not distant future. Both these elements are clearly reflected in the final couplet, and indeed constitute its point.

14 *leave*] 'forgo', not 'depart from'.

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
 Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang: 4
 In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
 As after sunset fadeth in the west,
 Which by and by black night doth take away,
 Death's second self that seals up all in rest: 8
 In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie
 As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
 Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by: 12
 This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong
 To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

1] Most modern editors insert a colon at *contented*, where the earliest editions have no stop. This seems to us both unnecessary and to break the line in a way untypical of Shakespeare's practice in the Sonnets.

arrest] Both (1) 'act of stopping' and (2) 'seizure by an officer' (cf. *Hamlet*, V, ii, 347: 'this fell sergeant, Death,/Is strict in his arrest'); though only sense (2) is developed in line 2.

2 *all*] 'any'.

3] The metaphor is not that of interest on capital, but of a legally recognized interest in an estate. 'My life' is not the *owner* but the *property* out of which the estate is carved. 'Hath' expresses not ownership of the estate, but inclusion in it, as in 'this house has three bedrooms'.

this line] 'this poetry'.

4 *still*] 'always'.

1-4] The general sense is: 'Do not distress yourself unduly when Death carries me away and no one can go bail for me; for my life has carved out from itself an estate, in the shape of this poetry which I write, and this will always remain with you as a memorial of me.'

5 *reviewest*] 're-read'.

review] 'see again'. There is a typical Shakespearean play on the two senses.

7 *his*] 'its'.

8 *spirit*] i.e. the nobler, volatile elements (air and fire; see note on Sonnet 44, line 11), as contrasted with the heavier and baser ('earth', line 7; 'dregs', line 9). 'Spirit' is also the creative genius of the poet (cf. Sonnet 86, line 5).

11] Commentators have disagreed much about this difficult line. 'Wretch' and 'knife' together suggest a common assassin, and so show what a cheap 'conquest' (i.e. either 'victim' or 'booty') the body is. But the assassin may be a personified symbol of Death himself, or perhaps of Time, the universal enemy in the *Sonnets*. Whoever the assassin is, the body, as distinguished from the soul or 'spirit', yields to the knife without courageous resistance.

12 *of*] 'by'.

13, 14] 'The value of the living body lies in the spirit which animates it; and in my case this spirit is one and the same as my poetry, which will live on with you.'

*But be contented when that fell arrest
 Without all bail shall carry me away:
 My life hath in this line some interest
 Which for memorial still with thee shall stay. 4
 When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
 The very part was consecrate to thee:
 The earth can have but earth, which is his due;
 My spirit is thine, the better part of me: 8
 So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,
 The prey of worms, my body being dead,
 The coward conquest of a wretch's knife,
 Too base of thee to be remembered: 12
 The worth of that is that which it contains,
 And that is this, and this with thee remains.*

The poet pleads that though he keeps silent while others write his friend's praises with elaborate poetical devices, his friend should value him for his unspoken devotion.

1 *in manners holds her still*] 'with becoming restraint keeps quiet'.

2 *comments*] 'expository treatises'.

of your praise] 'in praise of you'.

compil'd] 'composed' (cf. *Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, iii, 134: 'Longaville/Did never for her sake sonnet compile').

3 *Reserve*] 'store up', 'lay up in permanent record'—a sense given in early dictionaries down to Johnson's of 1755. There is no need for the many proposed emendations.

character] 'writing', as commonly at the time (cf. Sonnet 59, line 8). Lines 3-4 may be interpreted: 'Store up manuscript upon manuscript, writing them in letters of gold and in choice phrases polished by learned study of the greatest poets'. Alternatively line 3 could mean: 'Lay up in permanent record their characteristic style (or styles) by writing in letters of gold choice phrases . . .'

4 *fil'd*] 'polished'.

6] It was the duty of the parish clerk to lead the responses and the *Amens*.

unletter'd] 'illiterate', and therefore merely automatic in his responses.

still] 'always'.

7 *that*] relative ('which'), not a demonstrative particularizing one writer.

able spirit] Either (1) 'powerful genius' (abstract), or (2) 'any talented genius' (concrete). The omission of 'some' or 'any', required by sense (2), is not uncommon in Shakespeare.

10 *the most of praise*] 'the highest praise'.

11-12] Shakespeare's words, by their inferiority to others', should yield their precedence; but his love (being so great) should take precedence of theirs. (It is as if they were being arranged in a procession according to order of worth.)

13 *respect*] not 'pay deference to', but 'pay attention to'—cf. 'unrespected' in Sonnet 54, line 10.

14 *in effect*] 'in reality'.

My tongue-tied Muse in manners holds her still,
 While comments of your praise richly compil'd
 Reserve their character with golden quill
 And precious phrase by all the Muses fil'd. 4
 I think good thoughts, whilst others write good words,
 And like unletter'd clerk still cry 'Amen'
 To every hymn that able spirit affords
 In polish'd form of well-refinèd pen. 8
 Hearing you prais'd I say, ' 'Tis so, 'tis true',
 And to the most of praise add something more;
 But that is in my thought, whose love to you,
 Though words come hindmost, holds his rank before. 12
 Then others for the breath of words respect:
 Me for my dumb thoughts, speaking in effect.

Several sonnets betray some jealousy of favours which the Friend seems to have been according to a rival. Who this rival was we do not know. Many candidates have their advocates—Chapman, Marlowe, Drayton being the names most frequently and vigorously canvassed.

The imagery shows the characteristic Shakespearean transitions from one metaphor to another not connected by any logical necessity—here from a great galleon to unborn (or still-born) thoughts, to falconry, and thence to a familiar spirit (of the past or present) inspiring his rival.

1 *proud*] To an Elizabethan the word would imply (1) stateliness and splendour, (2) swelling sails, (3) confidence. The image of lines 1 and 2 is of a 'tall ship' bound on an expedition for booty.

full sail] great spread of canvas, sails filled with wind, powerful forward movement—all these impressions would have corresponding features in the 'full' literary style metaphorically alluded to. (For the sense of movement cf. *Hamlet*, IV, vi, 19-20: 'Finding ourselves too slow of sail'.)

3 *ripe*] i.e. for birth.

inhearse] 'bury'. ('Hearse' did not then mean a funeral carriage, but sometimes an erection over the bier or tomb, sometimes the coffin or tomb itself.) The image is of thoughts, ripe for birth, dying unborn and being buried for ever in the brain that conceived them.

4 *tomb . . . womb*] The internal rhyme emphasizes the paradox.

5 *spirit*] Either 'vigorous mind' or 'daemon'—just possibly a play on both.

by spirits] Here either (1) 'great talents of the past' or less probably (2) 'live-witted associates' or (3) 'supernatural familiars'. In any case there is a play on 'spirit' and 'spirits'.

6 *pitch*] 'height', the technical term in falconry.

7 *his compeers by night*] If sense (1) for 'spirits' (line 5, above) is right, this means 'books (or their authors) over which he burns midnight oil'. Other meanings would follow obviously enough from senses (2) or (3) above.

8 *astonished*] 'paralysed', as lightning might do. (The ultimate root is Lat. *attonare*.) (The milder sense 'greatly surprised' dates only from the eighteenth century.)

9, 10] The allusion is obscure. Sense (1) of 'spirits' (line 5) would suggest one great author of the past on whom the rival relied; sense (2) one member of the coterie of 'witty' friends; sense (3) a 'familiar spirit' who helped him write.

10 *gulls*] Either (1) 'crams' or (2) 'dupes'. If we were sure that lines 1 and 5-6 were ironical, the sense would be that the rival was misled into false ideas of form and content.

*Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,
 Bound for the prize of all-too-precious you,
 That did my ripe thoughts in my brain inhearse,
 Making their tomb the womb wherein they grew? 4*
*Was it his spirit, by spirits taught to write
 Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead?
 No, neither he, nor his compeers by night
 Giving him aid, my verse astonished: 8*
*He, nor that affable familiar ghost
 Which nightly gulls him with intelligence,
 As victors of my silence cannot boast,—
 I was not sick of any fear from thence: 12*
*But when your countenance fill'd up his line,
 Then lack'd I matter; that enfeeb'l'd mine.*

intelligence] 'information'. Shakespeare never uses the word to refer to a mental faculty or gift.

12 *of*] 'from', or 'with'.

13 *countenance*] Perhaps both (1) 'features' (the Friend's beauty as a subject for writing), and (2) 'favourable regard' (as an encouragement for writing). The play on these two senses would strengthen the couplet. If sense (2) is present, then 'filled up' would mean 'gave full body to'.

14 *that*] demonstrative—'that fact'. In reading the line, 'Then', and, still more, 'that', should be stressed.

There has been an estrangement—at least, the Friend has shown less kindness and respect for the poet, as if he were coming to think the poet in some way beneath his friendship; and the poet feels (or says he feels) he must accept his loss. This he expresses in terms of the Friend's legal right to free himself from a bond. The legal language, likely to be unfamiliar to many modern readers, would be familiar to an educated Elizabethan.

1 *dear*] In Elizabethan and earlier usage this could mean both (1) 'of great value' and (2) 'of high rank'. So in *Troilus and Cressida*, V, iii, 27: 'Life every man holds dear [= sense (1)]; but the dear man [= sense (2)]/Holds honour far more precious—dear than life'.

2 *estimate*] 'value'.

3 *charter*] either (1) 'privilege' or (2) the document conferring it. The reader will see for himself how the image works slightly differently according to which sense he attaches to the word.

worth] this involves the same senses as 'dear' in line 1.

releasing] Charters usually granted exemptions from legal obligations.

4 *determinate*] 'ended'—because the charter has 'released' the Friend from the obligations the bonds imposed.

8 *my patent . . . swerving*] 'my title of possession (conferred by the bonds) reverts to you'.

9 *Thy self*] To print as two words (as in the 1609 Quarto) fits better with 'it' in line 10, and conveys the sense, frequent in the *Sonnets* and strongly present in this poem, of the self as an entity.

worth] see note on line 3.

10 *mistaking*] 'misjudging' (by overestimating).

11 *upon misprision growing*] 'originating in a misjudgment'.

12 *making*] is probably a present participle with 'you' understood as its subject, and the line would then mean '(The gift of your friendship) comes back to me when you revise your judgment for the better'. But it is an admittedly obscure line.

Farewell—thou art too dear for my possessing,
 And like enough thou know'st thy estimate:
 The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
 My bonds in thee are all determinate. 4
 For how do I hold thee but by thy granting?
 And for that riches where is my deserving?
 The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,
 And so my patent back again is swerving. 8
 Thy self thou gav'st, thy own worth then not knowing;
 Or me, to whom thou gav'st it, else mistaking:
 So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
 Comes home again on better judgment making. 12
 Thus have I had thee as a dream doth flatter—
 In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.

Another protest to the estranged Friend. The structure and movement of the poem follow a pattern that may be called 'typical of the Shakespeare Sonnets', which should not be taken to mean, however, that every Shakespeare sonnet has the same pattern—or even one of only two or three. The second quatrain develops the theme outlined in the first, adding a new and characteristically vivid image from physical nature. The third develops this theme further, to a point of apparent conclusion; and the couplet finally reconciles the whole.

2 *bent*] 'determined'.

cross] 'frustrate'.

4] The sense of a weighty impact or fall seems more in keeping than the more usual explanation 'casually or unexpectedly come in', or 'casually add more to my already accumulated griefs'.

for] 'as'.

after-loss] 'a later or final disaster' (see note above). The expression seems also, however, to involve a play on (1) 'defeat' (cf. the military image in lines 6 and 11) and (2) 'loss' of the Friend (cf. 'leave' in line 9 and 'loss of thee' in line 14).

6 *in the rearward of*] i.e. like a reserve following up earlier waves of troops whose attack has been repulsed. (The poet has survived the other blows of fortune and the world; but this final assault would overthrow him.)

8 *linger out*] 'protract', 'prolong', or, possibly 'delay', 'defer' (cf. 'now' in line 1 and 'purpos'd' in this line).

purpos'd] that which was intended either (1) by Fortune or (2) by the Friend, or possibly (3) by both.

8] To 'protract' or alternatively to 'defer' the final defeat which has been planned.

10 *other petty griefs*] i.e. other and, by comparison petty, griefs. There is no suggestion that *this* grief is petty.

11 *in the onset*] 'in the first wave of attack' (cf. 'rearward' in line 6).

13 *strains*] The primary sense, 'kinds', seems to be combined with the secondary sense 'stresses', to reinforce the line.

Then hate me when thou wilt,—if ever, now—
 Now, while the world is bent my deeds to cross,
 Join with the spite of Fortune, make me bow,
 And do not drop in for an after-loss: 4
 Ah do not, when my heart hath 'scap'd this sorrow,
 Come in the rearward of a conquer'd woe;
 Give not a windy night a rainy morrow,
 To linger out a purpos'd overthrow. 8
 If thou wilt leave me, do not leave me last,
 When other petty griefs have done their spite,
 But in the onset come: so shall I taste
 At first the very worst of Fortune's might;— 12
 And other strains of woe, which now seem woe,
 Compar'd with loss of thee will not seem so.

The poet assures himself, by 'witty' reasoning, that as long as he lives he will enjoy the Friend's love—but closes with a fearful reservation.

2 *term of life*] 'As long as I live.' Like 'assured' and 'title' (line 10) this is a legal expression.

5-6] 'I need not fear the worst wrong of all, alienation, for the least sign of unfriendliness or inconstancy will kill me.'

8 *humour*] Either (1) 'temporary mood' or (2) 'permanent disposition' (cf. the Mediaeval and Renaissance doctrine of humours).

10 *revolt*] Not 'rebellion' but, as frequently in Shakespeare, 'act of inconstancy', 'change of affection'.

doth lie] 'depends'.

11 *happy title*] '(1) fortunate, and (2) joyful, right of ownership'. (Cf. line 2.)

13] 'But what beautiful time is so fortunate as not to run the danger of being sullied?' ('Blessèd fair' is hyphenated by most editors; but Shakespeare nowhere else uses 'blessèd' in any adverbial sense, and frequently uses 'fair' as a noun = 'beauty' or 'beautiful thing'. 'So blessèd fair' = 'so blessèd a beautiful thing'—'so' plus a noun being used as in the 1611 Bible, *John*, xiv, 9: 'Have I been so long time with you?')

13-14] There may well be both a surface and a deeper meaning here. On the surface, 'mayst' could suggest the future, and 'yet' be taken as = 'nevertheless'—a pang of awareness of a *future* possibility hitherto blissfully un contemplated. But subtly underlying this may be a darker hint: 'mayst' could be a present tense, and 'yet' = 'as yet', giving a far more deadly second meaning to the couplet.

*But do thy worst to steal thyself away,
 For term of life thou art assurèd mine;
 And life no longer than thy love will stay,
 For it depends upon that love of thine: 4
 Then need I not to fear the worst of wrongs,
 When in the least of them my life hath end;
 I see a better state to me belongs
 Than that which on thy humour doth depend: 8
 Thou canst not vex me with inconstant mind,
 Since that my life on thy revolt doth lie.
 Oh what a happy title do I find—
 Happy to have thy love, happy to die! 12
 *But what's so blessèd fair that fears no blot?
 Thou mayst be false and yet I know it not.**

An elusive poem: for how far is this 'type portrait' unqualified praise? Some take it as an ideal, others as highly critical. We suggest that it expresses admiration but, particularly in lines 3 and 4 and possibly in line 7, reservations. The virtue described is, in any case, a passive or negative one, and many may, like us, feel some shrinking from such cold and unresponsive characters. The cold image of stone, however, is countered by the warmer image of the summer's flower to suggest the positive excellence of such people and their benefit to society. Yet this in turn gives rise to a warning that these paragons, once corrupted, will sink far lower than moral mediocrities.

1 *will do none*] 'do not desire to do any (injury)'.

2 *the thing . . . show*] what they most look as if they could do.

5 *rightly*] 'really' or 'indeed'. Shakespeare uses the word only this once in all his poems, and of a total of 23 occurrences in the plays not one bears the moral or legal sense 'of right', 'legitimately' or 'justly'.

6 *husband . . . expense*] 'carefully protect . . . from wasteful spending'.

8 *stewards*] A steward is almost always in Shakespeare the official on an estate who manages its affairs for the owner.

their excellence] the good qualities of the characters of lines 1-7, not of the 'others' of this line.

10 *to itself it only live*] 'it lives only to itself', i.e. *not* 'selfishly' but 'unpollinated'. The position of 'only' in English sentences down to the end of the eighteenth century often misleads a modern reader. Cf. *Measure for Measure*, III, ii, 237: 'Novelty is only in request', which means 'Only novelty is in demand'.

12 *outbraves*] 'makes a finer show than'.

his] 'its' (i.e. the flower's).

13 *by their deeds*] i.e. by acting corruptly. This is a startling addition to what has gone before: these *impassive* people have sunk so low by having acquired the habit of *acting* corruptly. (So Aristotle taught, that one becomes what one is by what one does.)

14 *fester*] 'rot'. Cf. *King Henry V*, IV, iii, 88: 'their poor bodies must lie and fester'.

They that have power to hurt and will do none,
 That do not do the thing they most do show,
 Who moving others are themselves as stone,
 Unmovèd, cold, and to temptation slow— 4
 They rightly do inherit heaven's graces,
 And husband nature's riches from expense;
 They are the lords and owners of their faces,
 Others but stewards of their excellence. 8
 The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,
 Though to itself it only live and die;
 But if that flower with base infection meet,
 The basest weed outbraves his dignity: 12
 For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
 Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

1 *absence*] Probably literal, 'physical absence'; though some editors have suggested a reference to the estrangement of the friends. The absence is really that of the Friend (see line 12).

5 *this time remov'd*] 'this time of removal', i.e. 'when you were away'.

7] The variety of possible meanings of 'wanton' enrich the line: (1) 'frolicsome' (of children, who are a 'wanton burthen'); (2) 'luxuriant'; (3) as an adjective transferred from 'the prime' (i.e. spring), 'amorously sportive'—in Nature's mating season.

8] The sense of the sonnet forbids taking this line lugubriously. The poet is not mourning the death of spring: moreover widows often especially cherish the posthumous child.

9-10] The time referred to is that of separation named in lines 1-4. 'At that time it seemed to me that the promised abundance would prove joyless if you were not with me.' ('Seem'd' shows that the poet is looking back and remembering.)

Whatever the season when the poem was written, its 'poetical moment' is autumn. The months of separation seemed like winter (lines 1-4), though by the calendar (line 5) they were summer, as the coming of autumn with its abundance proved (lines 6-8). Lines 9-10 take us back to the time of dejected separation, and there we remain to the end: the present tense of lines 11-14 is neutral or indefinite—describing what is always the case when the friend is absent.

11 *wait on thee*] Either (1) 'attend upon you as your minions', or (2) 'await your coming'.

13 *with . . . cheer*] 'with so heavy a heart'. 'Cheer', originally meaning 'face' or 'countenance', later came to mean 'disposition' or 'frame of mind' or 'mood'.

How like a winter hath my absence been
 From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
 What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen! —
 What old December's bareness everywhere! 4
 And yet this time remov'd was summer's time, —
 The teeming autumn big with rich increase
 Bearing the wanton burthen of the prime,
 Like widow'd wombs after their lords' decease: 8
 Yet this abundant issue seem'd to me
 But hope of orphans, and unfather'd fruit;
 For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
 And thou away the very birds are mute: 12
 Or if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer
 That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

2 *proud-pied*] 'splendidly many-hued'.

trim] 'array'.

4 *heavy Saturn*] Saturn was astrologically a cold, slow planet, increasing the black bile of melancholy. Cf. our modern adjective 'saturnine'.

6 *different flowers in*] i.e. flowers differing in.

hue] Though (e.g. in Sonnet 104, line 11) this can be either general beauty or specifically 'shape' or 'form', it here probably means 'colour'.

7 *any summer's story tell*] The seasons are not being confused. The phrase probably means 'speak (or write) happily at all'.

8 *proud*] 'showy'.

lap] i.e. the flower bed.

9 *wonder at*] 'admire'.

11 *They . . . sweet*] i.e. they were just sweet-smelling flowers and nothing more deeply satisfying.

figures of delight] 'representations of the (Platonic) Idea of Delight'.

12 *after you*] 'taking you as the model'.

'you . . . those] 'and you are the pattern . . .': the poet is not apostrophizing the Friend in the vocative case.

13 *you away*] an absolute construction, 'and you (being) away'—i.e. when you were away.

14 *shadow*] 'image' or 'reflection', not 'shade'.

I . . . did play] 'I toyed in my mind with these flowers.'

From you have I been absent in the spring,
 When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
 Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing,
 That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leapt with him. 4
 Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
 Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
 Could make me any summer's story tell,
 Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew: 8
 Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
 Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose;
 They were but sweet, but figures of delight
 Drawn after you, you pattern of all those. 12
 Yet seem'd it winter still; and, you away,
 As with your shadow I with these did play.

Instances of fifteen-line sonnets occur in other Elizabethan collections, though this is the only one among Shakespeare's. Although, in point of rhyme alone, line 1 or line 5 is the extra line, no line in the poem can be removed without damage to the sense or syntax. There is no reason to suspect a false text, though it is possible that the poem as it stands was a rough draft.

1 *forward*] a pun seems to be involved, on (1) 'seasonally forward', (2) 'cheeky'.
3 *purple pride*] 'highly-coloured splendour'.

4 *for complexion*] 'as colour'.

5 *grossly*] Either 'heavily', giving a coarse colour; or 'obviously', thus paralleling the suggestion 'Where else could you have got it?' of lines 2-3.

6 *I condemnèd for*] 'I condemned for stealing its whiteness from . . .

7] Scent ('sweet marjoram') seems the most natural allusion, though there seems no conclusive reason to suppose that either the tight knots of the bud clusters or the colour (? dark auburn) is omitted from reference.

8 *fearfully*] as being conscious of their guilty thefts.

9] 'Blushing' is adjectival not verbal in function. The red rose is 'blushing shame' personified, just as the white rose is 'white despair' personified.

10] The third rose is a tempered pink and therefore shows neither shame nor despair: *of both* = either (1) 'from both' or (2) 'something of each'.

11 *annex'd*] 'added', 'united'.

13 *canker*] the canker worm.

ate] 'was eating'.

15 *sweet*] 'sweet smell'.

The forward violet thus did I chide:
'Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells,
If not from my love's breath? The purple pride
Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells 4
In my love's veins thou hast too grossly dyed.'
The lily I condemnèd for thy hand,
And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair;
The roses fearfully on thorns did stand— 8
One blushing shame, another white despair;
A third, nor red nor white, had stol'n of both,
And to his robbery had annex'd thy breath,
But for his theft in pride of all his growth 12
A vengeful canker ate him up to death.

More flowers I noted, yet I none could see
But sweet or colour it had stol'n from thee.

Several of the sonnets seem to be defending the poet against the Friend's suspicion that he is cooling in his affection, since he is not writing so much or so fulsomely in the Friend's praise. He offers here as justification for dignified silence that to write praises of the Friend is now becoming a commonplace among poets.

1 *seeming*] Possibly not simply 'appearance', but, as often elsewhere in Shakespeare, 'putting on a show'.

2 *appear*] not 'seem' (in the usual modern sense) but 'is in evidence' (Latin *apparere*). The stress is on 'love' and 'show'.

3 *merchandiz'd*] 'commercialized'.

whose rich esteeming] 'the rich estimate of whose worth'.

5 *in the spring*] primarily meaning 'in its early growth', but also involving the seasonal sense.

7 *Philomel*] the nightingale. According to one version of the Greek myth of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela, Philomela, threatened with death by Tereus, was changed by the gods into a nightingale. The tale was a favourite with Elizabethan poets, including Shakespeare.

10 *mournful*] There were several variants of the classical myth of the fate of Philomela; but in all her fate was a tragic one that made her songs mournful.

did hush the night] i.e. silenced all other creatures with the powerful beauty of her song. Possibly there is also present a secondary sense of 'lulled the night to sleep'.

11 *But that*] Paralleling line 9 ('Not that . . . but that'). 'That' is not here a demonstrative adjective.

wild] 'tumultuous' (i.e. all kinds of birds are singing now, in late summer).

burthens . . . bough] 'loads every bough with its burden (burthen)'. But the verb 'burthens' may also suggest the sense borne by the noun 'burthen' = 'chorus'. (Shakespeare plays on the noun in both senses elsewhere.) The allusion here is almost certainly to the other poets who are now singing the Friend's praises and of whom he writes in other sonnets.

12 *sweets*] 'pleasant things'.

dear] 'keenly appreciated'.

13 *sometime*] 'from time to time'.

14] 'Because I do not wish my song to pall on your senses.' The emphasis seems to be on the word 'dull' (not on 'song').

My love is strengthen'd, though more weak in seeming;
 I love not less, though less the show appear:
 That love is merchandiz'd whose rich esteeming
 The owner's tongue doth publish everywhere. 4
 Our love was new, and then but in the spring,
 When I was wont to greet it with my lays;
 As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
 And stops her pipe in growth of riper days: 8
 Not that the summer is less pleasant now
 Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
 But that wild music burthens every bough,
 And sweets grown common lose their dear delight. 12
 Therefore like her I sometime hold my tongue;
 Because I would not dull you with my song.

2 *when . . . eyed*] 'To eye' in the simplest sense of 'to see' is now obsolete, but was once quite common. There is probably a deliberate sound-play in the line which might at the time have seemed witty.

3 *seems*] i.e. 'to me'—cf. lines 11 and 12. A central theme of the poem is that to the close friend signs of decay are imperceptible.

4 *pride*] i.e. their glorious show. See 'proud' in the Glossary.

7] The blaze of summer has burned up the delicate scents of the spring flowers.

8 *fresh*] i.e. in the first beauty of youth.

green] probably intended not as a contrast with 'fresh' but as roughly synonymous with it.

9 *dial*] 'clock' or 'watch'.

10 *his*] primarily 'its' (= the dial's); though quite possibly with a play on 'his' (= the friend's).

figure] the figure on the dial marking the hour. Some have seen here a play on the sense 'appearance'; taken too strongly, however, such a play could destroy the 'dial hand' image.

.9-10] 'Beauty steals away as imperceptibly as the hand of a watch steals away from the figures on the dial.'

10 *and . . . perceiv'd*] An absolute participial construction like this was far commoner in Elizabethan English than today.

11 *sweet hue*] literally 'sweetness of appearance'—i.e. 'handsomeness', paralleling, for the working of the image, 'beauty' (line 9) in general.

methinks . . . stand] 'seems to me to remain unaltered' (as the clock hand seemed to stay still).

13 *For fear of which*] i.e. because of my fear of this.

hear this] Cf. the 'Oyez!' of a public proclamation.

13 *thou*, 14 *you*] Possibly 'thou' stands collectively for the age, and 'you' for the individuals who would live in it.

14 *beauty's summer*] the Golden Age of Beauty. This, of course, means the time when the Friend (who was the embodiment of Beauty) was in his prime. The future will thus never have seen Beauty in its perfection.

To me, fair friend, you never can be old,
 For as you were ~~when~~ first your eye I eyed
 Such seems your beauty still: three winters cold
 Have from the forests shook three summers' pride, 4
 Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turn'd
 In process of the seasons have I seen,
 Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burn'd,
 Since first I saw you fresh which yet are green. 8
 Ah yet doth beauty like a dial hand
 Steal from his figure, and no pace perceiv'd,
 So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand,
 Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceiv'd,— 12
 For fear of which hear this, thou age unbred:
 Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead.

1 *wasted*] In Elizabethan English this sometimes meant just 'past and gone', and sometimes 'gone to ruin'. Contexts usually make it clear which is relevant. Here it is hard to determine *how far* the figure of devastation is present, but in some degree it certainly is.

2 *wights*] 'men and women'—even then a somewhat archaic word.

3] It was not so much the Platonic idea of Beauty that made the old poetry 'beautiful', as the images of beautiful men and women that peopled it.

4 *lovely*] either (1) 'handsome' or (2) 'worthy of love'.

5 *blazon*] 'rich and precise description', as in 'blazoning' a coat of arms; but it also suggests praise, and publishing beauty to the world.

7 *their antique pen*] i.e. the pens of the old writers. See 'antique/antic' in the Glossary. Here there seems no suggestion of quaintness or inferior art (see lines 13–14 below).

would have] 'would have liked to'.

8 *master*] 'possess', 'own'.

10 *all you prefiguring*] i.e. all foreshadowing you.

11 *for*] 'because'.

divining eyes] 'eyes peering speculatively into the future'.

12 *skill*] The 1609 Quarto reads *still*, which has been defended. We read, with most modern editors, *skill*, because (1) to read *still* would leave us with no noun as the object of 'had'; (2) *still* does not seem to have been used before 1632 as = 'as yet', nor before 1722 as = 'however' or 'nevertheless'; (3) 'would have express'd' in line 7 implies that the old writers' attempts at expression did not achieve perfect success. The sense of *skill* here is probably 'understanding'.

13 *For we*] i.e. 'for even we'.

When in the chronicle of wasted time
 I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
 And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
 In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights, 4
 Then in the blazon of sweet beauty's best —
 Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow —
 I see their antique pen would have express'd
 Even such a beauty as you master now: 8
 So all their praises are but prophecies
 Of this our time, all you prefiguring;
 And for they look'd but with divining eyes
 They had not skill enough your worth to sing: 12
 For we which now behold these present days
 Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

This sonnet, quite aside from its tremendous evocative force of language and imagery, has attracted enormous attention from scholars interested in the academic problem of determining the date of composition of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. No one questions that many of the lines, particularly 5-8, suggest allusions to contemporary events: no one has successfully identified these events in a way that has won universal acceptance.

The theme of the poem is the exultant affirmation of a love for the Friend powerful enough to defy both the oblivion of time and even death itself. This is reinforced by the idea of the intense relief and hope that follows the passing of a recently threatened cataclysm. The language has that characteristically Shakespearean quality—the *suggestion* of images that have great emotional impact but prove incapable of precise description.

1-2] Whether these fears of the poet, or the premonitory apprehensions of the world at large, refer to some particular event, and, if so, what that event was, is a matter of much dispute. Fears of civil war (either from rebellion, or on the death of the Queen in 1603), of worldwide disasters foretold by astrologers for the year 1588, of national peril and of personal danger to the Queen in her Grand Climacteric year (when she became 63) in 1595-6, of the national threat from the Spanish Armada—all have their advocates. Whatever the particular allusion, the general impression of universal foreboding is the quality relevant to the poem.

3 yet] Probably equivalent to an 'even' following the 'Not' of line 1 (i.e. 'Not even . . .'), or perhaps 'after all'.

the lease of my true love] 'the period for which my deep and constant love is to last'. ('Love' = 'affection for my friend', not the friend himself.)

control] 'have power over'.

4 *Suppos'd as*] 'on the supposition (possibly suggested by the "fears") that it is'.
forfeit] Shakespeare is probably using a legal term loosely, to mean here 'subject'. (Strictly a lease could only be forfeit as a penalty, and it is difficult to see what such a penalty could be for here. Shakespeare's use of legal terms is very common, but it is also sometimes loose and inexact.)

to a confin'd doom] Assuming 'forfeit' to be loosely used, this would mean 'subject to the fate of being finite'.

5] The line has been variously asserted to refer to (1) the recovery of Queen Elizabeth from an illness in 1599-1600; (2) her successfully passing her Grand Climacteric in 1595-6; (3) the Queen's death in 1603; (4) Essex's rebellion, which threatened civil war in 1601; (5) the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Lunar eclipses, such as that in 1595, have been offered as less political candidates for the

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
 Of the wide world dreaming on things to come
 Can yet the lease of my true love control,
 Suppos'd as forfeit to a confin'd doom. 4
 The mortal moon hath her eclipse endur'd,
 And the sad augurs mock their own presage;
 Incertainties now crown themselves assur'd,
 And peace proclaims olives of endless age. 8
 Now with the drops of this most balmy time
 My love looks fresh; and Death to me subscribes,
 Since spite of him I'll live in this poor rhyme
 While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes: 12
 And thou in this shalt find thy monument
 When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

allusion. The meaning accorded to the words 'mortal', 'moon', 'eclipse' and 'endur'd' will vary according to, or will influence, the choice. 'Mortal' as = 'subject to death' would fit the Queen; either as = 'deadly' or as = 'subject to destruction' it would fit the Armada. 'Moon', as alluding to Elizabeth, would echo contemporary poets' habit of calling her Cynthia, the virgin goddess; as an allusion to the Armada it would refer to the famous crescent battle-formation the Spaniards adopted. 'Eclipse' was certainly used by Shakespeare (as it is sometimes still) for a final as well as for a temporary extinction: but he never uses 'endure' in the sense of 'succumb to', but only in one or other of the senses 'undergo', 'suffer', 'survive', 'last', or (though not relevant here) 'put up with'. This last point weighs against the claim for either the Queen's death or the Armada as the allusion.

6] i.e. the time is so joyous that even the solemn and gloomy Old Moores make fun of their former predictions. 'Sad' probably carries this double sense of (1) 'solemn', 'grave', and (2) 'gloomy in their prophecies'.

7] i.e. anxiety has given place to triumphant confidence.

8] It was the slow maturing and the long life of olive orchards that made them

become the symbol of peace. Like so many of the imaginatively effective lines in Shakespeare, this one is potently magical rather than cogently logical. It reverses the normal direction of the working of symbols, for it is here *peace* (as a herald) that proclaims the *olives*; through the word-association 'peace'—'olives'—'endless age' (which now suggests that the peace itself shall be a long one) it evokes a mood, rather than conveys a distinct image; and the total effect depends greatly on the interplay and sequence of sounds themselves.

9-10 *Now . . . fresh*] The poet's love revives as plants do when moisture follows a drought. 'Balmy' in Elizabethan English contains both the idea 'full of sap' and that of healing or refreshment. The 'drops' (of rain or dew) promote the rise of 'balm' (as = sap); and the word 'balmy' thus follows from 'drops' and thereafter acquires its second association of 'refreshing and healing'.

10 *My love*] 'the love I bear you'. It is unlikely that the word refers to the Friend himself as looking fresh. Cf. 'my true love' in line 3.

subscribes] 'submits', 'yields'.

12 *insults o'er*] 'exults over', 'triumphs over': the only meaning in Shakespeare, who never uses 'insult' to mean 'assail with contemptuous speech'.

dull and speechless tribes] 'the dull and inarticulate multitude'.

14 *tyrants*] 'cruel despots or usurpers', as always in Shakespeare except in Bottom's reference to 'Ercles' as 'a tyrant', i.e. a ranting, roaring fellow. (Bottom is, of course, hardly an authority on the usage of words!)

are spent] 'have perished'.

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come
Can yet the lease of my true love control,
Suppos'd as forfeit to a confin'd doom. 4
The mortal moon hath her eclipse endur'd,
And the sad augurs mock their own presage;
Incertainties now crown themselves assur'd,
And peace proclaims olives of endless age. 8
Now with the drops of this most balmy time
My love looks fresh; and Death to me subscribes,
Since spite of him I'll live in this poor rhyme
While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes: 12
And thou in this shalt find thy monument
When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

1 *character*] 'write'.

2 *figur'd*] 'represented'.

true] 'constant'.

3 *what now*] Some modern editors read *new* instead of the 1609 Quarto's *now*, which we print here. Emendation can only be justified by a serious objection to the most authoritative text, and the vowel-change 'new—now' is both pleasing in itself and also calls more attention to these words than mere repetition would to the word 'new'.

3] Possibly, 'What novel compliment can be devised? What overlooked merit is there to record?' (perhaps paralleling the two parts of line 4).

4 *dear*] 'highly valued'.

5 *prayers divine*] i.e. a daily 'office' in set words.

5-8] This quatrain depends on the analogy of a daily religious office. This is first referred to in 'prayers divine' (line 5), is developed in line 6 ('each day say o'er the very same (words)'), and reaches a climax in the daring reference to the language of the Lord's Prayer in line 8. 'Counting no old thing old' thus means 'not regarding a many-times-repeated formula as outworn'; and 'thou mine, I thine' might be this formula, or the substance of it—again suggesting a biblical echo: 'My beloved is mine and I am his' (*The Song of Solomon*, ii, 16).

9-14] Although these lines seem to allude to the friend's presently growing old and losing his beauty, they may very well also refer to the repeated formula of line 7, and the two senses may thus run concurrently.

Sense 1 would be: 'And so a love that is eternal, in ever vigorous form' (line 9) 'takes little account of the impairing of beauty by age' (line 10), 'nor does it concede importance to the inevitable wrinkles' (line 11) 'but makes old age itself give way' (i.e. yield precedence as a page does to his lord) (line 12: but this line possibly *also* suggests a sense 'transforms old age itself into a youth'). The conclusion then is: 'since it finds the original idea that it had of love perpetuated in the very place where the passage of time and changes of outward appearance would' (or even 'strive to', taking 'would' as 'want to') 'make it seem dead' (lines 13-14).

Sense 2 would run: 'And thus a love that is eternal, expressed in a form of words that never loses its vitality, sets no store by the dusty overlay and wear and tear of time' (lines 9-10) 'and does not admit that words shrivel with age' (line 11), 'but makes an ancient phrase still his youthful and vigorous servant' (line 12). The couplet in this interpretation then means: 'finding the original idea of love still perpetuated in that formula which the passage of time and the pattern of the words might seem to render obsolete'.

*What's in the brain that ink may character
 Which hath not figur'd to thee my true spirit?
 What's new to speak, what now to register,
 That may express my love or thy dear merit? 4
 Nothing, sweet boy; but yet like prayers divine
 I must each day say o'er the very same,
 Counting no old thing old,—thou mine, I thine—
 Even as when first I hallow'd thy fair name. 8
 So that eternal love in love's fresh case
 Weighs not the dust and injury of age,
 Nor gives to necessary wrinkles place;
 But makes antiquity for aye his page, 12
 Finding the first conceit of love there bred
 Where time and outward form would show it dead.*

Readers familiar both with the controversies over religious ritual during the Reformation and ensuing times, and with debate today concerning the language of the Bible, the Prayer Book, and religious services, will find it easy to recognize the possibilities of the second set of meanings running concurrently with the first.

Often considered to be a lament by Shakespeare for being reduced to the necessity of appearing on the stage, or writing for the theatre. Lines 3-4 and 6-7 make the interpretation seem plausible, though it has been challenged.

2] 'The goddess who is the guilty cause of my wrongdoings.' (In Sonnet 110 (not included in this selection) the poet had tried to excuse himself for infidelities to the Friend.)

4 *public means*] Either 'a career involving appearance in public', or, more probably, 'a career dependent on public favour'.

which public manners breeds] The clause seems to operate on three planes: (1) 'which demands familiarity with all and sundry', (2) 'which engenders in certain company excessively "free" conversation and behaviour', (3) 'which encourages one to prostitute oneself in such ways'.

5 *brand*] 'stigma'.

6 *subdu'd*] 'reduced to the level of'.

8 *renew'd*] 'regenerated'.

10 *Potions of eisel*] 'draughts of vinegar'. The great French physician Paré (1517-90) included 'oxymel' (vinegar and honey) among his prescriptions against the plague. (For 'eisel' cf. *Hamlet*, V, i, 299: 'Woo't drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?')

12] 'Nor will I consider as bitter twofold penance undergone with the object of correcting me twice over.' 'Correct' and 'correction' in Elizabethan English meant 'punish' and 'punishment', not 'amend(ment)'.

14 *Even that your pity*] 'Even that pity of yours, by itself.' ('That' is here a demonstrative adjective, not a conjunction.)

Oh, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
 The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
 That did not better for my life provide
 Than public means which public manners breeds. 4
 Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
 And almost thence my nature is subdu'd
 To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.
 Pity me then, and wish I were renew'd; 8
 Whilst like a willing patient I will drink
 Potions of eisel 'gainst my strong infection—
 No bitterness that I will bitter think,
 Nor double penance to correct correction: 12
 Pity me then, dear friend, and I assure ye
 Even that your pity is enough to cure me.

Whether or not prompted by some particular occasion in the relationship with the Friend, the present sonnet is a meditative attempt to define perfect love. In contrast with most of the Sonnets, the treatment is, until the last couplet, impersonal.

1 *Let me not*] 'May I never'—*not* 'Don't cause me to', *nor* 'Don't allow me to', *true*] 'faithful'.

2 *impediments*] Echoing the wording of the banns of marriage and of the marriage service in the Book of Common Prayer. (The version in the banns is: 'If any of you know cause, or just impediment, why these two persons should not be joined together in Holy Matrimony, ye are to declare it.')

3 *alteration*] Though the word may refer to infidelity, it could equally refer to the effects of Time, the universal enemy in the *Sonnets*, on beauty.

4] 'Or inclines to withdraw when the other's love withdraws.' (*Not* 'deviates from the straight path of love'; for both could 'deviate' to the *same* side.)

5 *mark*] 'sea-mark'.

8 *his*] 'its'.

8] i.e. true love is like a guiding star by whose altitude we may alter a course, but whose full value and potentialities can never be completely known.

9 *Love's . . . fool*] 'True love cannot be made the sport of Time.'

10 *bending*] Not an idle epithet: the curved sickle gathers as it cuts.

11 *his*] i.e. Time's. Time, the menace of lines 9 and 10, is here diminished to a series of petty periods.

12 *bears it out*] 'defiantly endures'.

edge] the image is the powerful one of an abyss.

13 *error*] Probably here in the strict legal sense of a faulty judgment—*not* just 'a mistake'.

13–14] 'If this is a false judgment (or a heresy), and this can be proved against me, *and* proved by citing my own case against me, then I've never written anything, and no man's love has ever been real love.' The poet asserts not only the correctness of his definition of true love, but also that true love exists, as proved by his own case.

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments: love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove. 4
 Oh no! it is an ever-fixèd mark
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wandering bark,
 Whose worth's unknown although his height be taken. 8
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom. 12
 *If this be error and upon me prov'd,
 I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.**

The poet tries to justify some infidelities to his friend by pleading that he committed them to try his friend's own faithfulness to him.

1, 2 *that . . . repay*] 'that I have been utterly slack in making a return appropriate to your deserts'.

3 *to call [upon]*] 'to invoke', almost as an act of worship.

4 *bonds*] playing on the two senses (1) 'obligations', (2) 'bonds of union'.

5 *frequent*] 'familiar'.

with unknown minds] possibly 'with goodness knows who'.

6] 'And given to the passing hour that attention which is yours by right because you have paid for it the high price of giving me your love.'

7, 8] i.e. 'I have yielded to every distraction which was most likely to isolate me from you (both spatially and spiritually)'.

9] 'Record against me both my deliberate and my involuntary offences.'

10] 'Add, to what you can validly prove, what you only suspect.'

11 *level*] most probably 'field of fire'.

13 *appeal*] 'plea by way of appeal'.

prove] 'test'.

14 *virtue*] 'strength', cf. Latin *virtus*.

*Accuse me thus: that I have scanted all
 Wherein I should your great deserts repay:
 Forgot upon your dearest love to call,
 Whereto all bonds do tie me day by day; 4
 That I have frequent been with unknown minds
 And given to time your own dear-purchas'd right;
 That I have hoisted sail to all the winds
 Which should transport me farthest from your sight: 8
 Book both my wilfulness and errors down,
 And on just proof surmise accumulate;
 Bring me within the level of your frown,
 But shoot not at me in your waken'd hate: 12
 Since my appeal says I did strive to prove
 The constancy and virtue of your love.*

1 *Siren tears*] 'Tears such as Sirens weep', i.e. tears luring to destruction. Whether the reference is to the tears of one individual temptress (e.g. the Dark Woman of Sonnets 127 onwards), or to a number of temptresses whom the poet had encountered, seems uncertain.

2 *limbeckes*] 'alembics', 'stills', 'retorts'.

3] 'Checking sanguine hopes with draughts of fear, and cheering too desperate fears with draughts of hope.'

4 *Still*] 'Always'.

saw . . . win] 'imagined myself to be winning'.

7 *spheres*] Originally the word 'spheres' meant the hard but transparent spheres within which the celestial bodies were set, or moved. By Shakespeare's time the term was often applied to the cavities between 'spheres' in the original sense, in which cavities alone the various moving bodies followed their orbits. The outer spheres were considered nobler than the inner.

It is possible, however, that 'spheres' here refers to the sockets of the eyes, though that would be somewhat confusing, in view of the fact that eyes *themselves* would have an at least equal claim to be considered 'spheres'.

The meaning of the line may either be that the 'eyes' have been (1) displaced from their proper sphere, contrary to nature, or that they have been (2) directing their gaze towards objects in lower spheres. If (1), then 'fitted' would mean 'made to fit' (out of their spheres, i.e. fitted into some baser sphere). If (2), 'fitted' would mean 'adapted to fit' (objects in lower spheres). It would seem as if Shakespeare had made no clear distinction between the relation of the eyes to their sphere, and the relation of their gaze to its objects.

Whatever the exact working of the metaphor, Shakespeare may here be suggesting that the woman (or women) he had been paying attention to was from a lower spiritual plane than his own, and by implication that his real spiritual plane was that of his friend.

An alternative interpretation that has been suggested: 'My eyes have been convulsed in my feverish fits', cannot be supported as the primary meaning by any linguistic parallel to that use of 'fitted'. But Shakespeare may well have intended the wording to suggest an association of feverish fits.

10] 'Superior things are always better' (or, possibly, 'realized to be better') 'after an intervening experience of evil.' The line gains force from its play on the different senses of the two words 'better'.

11-12] These lines might well have reminded an educated Elizabethan of Terence's words '*amantium irae amoris integratio est*' (*Andria*, III, iii, 23).

*What potions have I drunk of Siren tears
 Distill'd from limbacks foul as hell within.
 Applying fears to hopes and hopes to fears,
 Still losing when I saw myself to win! 4
 What wretched errors hath my heart committed
 Whilst it hath thought itself so blessèd never!
 How have mine eyes out of their spheres been fitted
 In the distraction of this madding fever! 8
 Oh, benefit of ill! now I find true
 That better is by evil still made better,
 And ruin'd love when it is built anew
 Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater: 12
 So I return rebuk'd to my content,
 And gain by ills thrice more than I have spent.*

13 to my content] i.e. 'to that relationship which fully satisfies me'.

14 ills] Most modern editors follow the emendation proposed by the great eighteenth-century Shakespearean scholar, Edmond Malone: *ill*; but Shakespeare may well be speaking concretely here; and the 'potions' and the experiences referred to in the octave are all mentioned in the plural.

The poem opens with a paradox: that an unkindness suffered in the past may provide a present help and consolation (line 1). Memory of what the poet then suffered makes him now penitent for having recently hurt his friend (lines 2-4). If the Friend has now suffered as he himself once did, the former must have endured hell (lines 5-6). Yet hitherto the poet has given no time to considering the comparison (lines 7-8).

This completes the octave and presents the emotional situation.

The next quatrain may be freely paraphrased thus:

'Good heavens, what we suffered in our previous estrangement' (or, alternatively, 'Would that what we then suffered') 'might have put me in mind how deeply sorrow hurts, and made me offer promptly, as you did on that other occasion, the salve of humble apology which is the apt remedy for wounded hearts!' (lines 9-12).

This gives the emotional response to the situation of the octave; but the couplet brings in the 'witty' or intellectual resolution that is still lacking, and the return to the theme of line 1. 'The wrong you formerly did me becomes now the ransom-money for my offence; for my injury to you expiates yours to me, and you must in turn allow yours to expiate mine.'

3 *my transgression*] i.e. the poet's present offence to the Friend.

3-4] The image is not one of sensation or emotion, but the much more concrete one of heavy pressure (here *of the offence*) weighing down a human frame. 'Nerves' in Elizabethan English most frequently meant 'sinews' or 'tendons'.

9 *remember'd*] 'reminded'—as often in Shakespeare: cf. *The Tempest*, I, ii, 243: 'Let me remember thee what thou hast promis'd'.

11 *tender'd*] The grammatical subject is 'our night of woe' (line 9); but this works indirectly by causing the poet to act.

13 *that*] demonstrative, not conjunctive.

That you were once unkind befriended me now,
 And for that sorrow which I then did feel
 Needs must I under my transgression bow,
 Unless my nerves were brass or hammer'd steel: 4
 For if you were by my unkindness shaken
 As I by yours, you have pass'd a hell of time;
 And I, a tyrant, have no leisure taken
 To weigh how once I suffer'd in your crime. 8
 Oh, that our night of woe might have remember'd
 My deepest sense how hard true sorrow hits,
 And soon to you as you to me then tender'd
 The humble salve which wounded bosoms fits! 12
 But that your trespass now becomes a fee:
 Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransom me.

2 *not to be receives reproach of being*] 'not to be vile receives the reproach of being vile'.

3-4] Two interpretations seem possible: (1) 'And the legitimate pleasure (in some comparatively innocent affair) is destroyed by the reproach that it is vile, though this is only the opinion of those looking on, and not what our own experience tells us'; or (2) 'And one hasn't had the fun, which other people would consider legitimate in such cases, though we do not do so ourselves'. 'So' in (1) would refer to 'vile', and in (2) to 'just pleasure'. It is hard to decide between the two interpretations.

5 *For why*] Possibly = just 'Why'. The form survives in dialect.

adulterate] possibly simply 'corrupted' (by lewd thoughts, or even conduct), rather than specifically 'adulterous'.

5, 6] 'Why, just because I have a certain sexual vitality, should other people's shifty corrupted eyes greet it with knowing glances?'

7 *frailer*] 'people morally still frailer than I am'.

8] 'Whose own evil desires and intents interpret as evil conduct which seems to me perfectly blameless.'

9 *I am . . . I am*] 'I admit to what I am, and I am not ashamed of it', with the implication that no base thinking on the part of those people will make him anything else.

level] 'take aim at'.

10 *reckon up*] i.e. 'show the measure of'.

11 *bevel*] 'out of true'. The image may be either from the game of bowls or from heraldry.

13, 14] Difficult lines which may mean: 'Unless they are maintaining this general view: that all men are evil, and that those who judge do so from the standpoint of their own badness (in which case they are condemned out of their own mouths).' In this interpretation 'reign' is taken to mean 'exercise authority'. Such an interpretation certainly gives the sonnet a strong ending. To take 'reign' to mean 'prosper', 'flourish', as some editors do, not only gives a weaker ending but is hard to support from Elizabethan linguistic usage.

*'Tis better to be vile than vile esteem'd,
 When not to be receives reproach of being,
 And the just pleasure lost which is so deem'd
 Not by our feeling but by others' seeing. 4
 For why should others' false adulterate eyes
 Give salutation to my sportive blood?
 Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
 Which in their wills count bad what I think good? 8
 No: I am that I am, and they that level
 At my abuses reckon up their own;
 I may be straight though they themselves be bevel;
 By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown,— 12
 Unless this general evil they maintain:
 All men are bad and in their badness reign.*

Several of the sonnets defy Time, the universal destroyer, in the name of the eternal faithfulness of true love and friendship, and sometimes of the immortality verse can bestow (cf. e.g. nos. 18, 19, 60, 65, 124). Here the novelties that Time will destroy, the antiquities men admire, the charges that Time effects, that history records, and that come to be repeated (line 4), are all dismissed as ephemera compared with the poet's unshakeable fidelity to his friend.

2] The *general* sense of the line is 'Your vast buildings erected by modern techniques'. There may be a *particular* source of the reference to 'pyramids' in a set of obelisks, originally brought from Egypt to ancient Imperial Rome, and re-erected between 1586 and 1589 by Pope Sixtus V. These are often referred to (e.g. by Sir John Eliot in 1593 and by William Lithgow in 1609) as 'pyramids'; and Shakespeare was, as we know, attentive to travellers' gossip. If these are the 'pyramids' he had in mind, they were certainly in one sense (see note on line 4, below) only 'dressings of a former sight'.

3 *nothing . . . nothing*] 'in no way . . . in no way'. The Elizabethan pronunciation 'no-thing' would bring out more clearly than our modern 'nuthing' this quite common contemporary adverbial usage of 'nothing'.

4 *dressings . . . sight*] 're-erectments of things that have been seen before'.

5 *Our dates*] 'The allotted spans of our lives'.

admire] 'wonder at', 'gape at'—the commonest Elizabethan sense.

7 *make them born to our desire*] 'persuade ourselves that they are newly created to match our taste'.

8 *think . . . told*] 'call to mind that we have heard all this before'.

9] 'I set no store by either your historical records or you yourself.'

11] The 'and' is stressed: 'For your chronicles of the past and our present experience are *both of them* utterly deceptive'.

doth] this was a common early form of the plural.

12 *Made more or less*] i.e. made to appear sometimes more, sometimes less important. Time is always in such a hurry that we can never get things into proper perspective. The receding past disproportionately loses significance, and the ever-new present looms disproportionately large.

No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change:
 Thy pyramids built up with newer might
 To me are nothing novel, nothing strange,—
 They are but dressings of a former sight. 4
 Our dates are brief, and therefore we admire
 What thou dost foist upon us that is old,
 And rather make them born to our desire
 Than think that we before have heard them told. 8
 Thy registers and thee I both defy,
 Not wondering at the present nor the past;
 For thy records and what we see doth lie,
 Made more or less by thy continual haste. 12
 This I do vow and this shall ever be:—
 I will be true despite thy scythe and thee.

1 *dear love*] 'heartfelt devotion'. 'Love' is here the affection, not (as 'child' might perhaps suggest) the person loved. 'Dear' carries the further implication of great value.

but the child of state] i.e. the mere offspring of circumstance, e.g. of the Friend's power and prosperity.

2] i.e. it might, as a casual child born of Fortune as its mother, have no proper father. (As things really stand, the Friend is its legitimate father.)

3-4] The insecurity that such a 'bastard of fortune' would have had is compared to that of plants which Time quite capriciously chooses to throw away in disgust ('hate', line 3) or to cherish ('love') as flowers.

5 *far from accident*] 'out of the reach of chance'.

6 *suffers not . . . pomp*] 'does not deteriorate in happy and glorious circumstances'.

6-7 *nor falls . . . discontent*] 'nor succumbs to any blow of bottled-up resentment'. The images in these two lines seem to be of courtly success, and of being waylaid by a thug. Both images seem to work in a double way, viz (1) such genuine affection is not exposed to courtly flattery or vindictive grudges; (2) even were it so exposed it would not weaken.

8] 'To which the temptations of today expose the likes of us.' (For 'fashion' = 'kind' or 'sort', cf. *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, V, iv, 61: 'Thou friend of an ill fashion'.)

9 *policy . . . heretic*] 'expediency, that fellow of false principles'.

10] 'Which acts on a short-term view' (whereas love fixes its mind on the permanent).

11] 'But in stout independence remains boldly and supremely prudent.'

12 *That*] Either (1) 'So that', or (2) 'In that'.

12 *showers*] 'shower' often meant 'downpour', as the verb sometimes does today.

13 *To this*] i.e. to the supreme satisfaction of this invulnerable attitude.

13 *To this I witness call*] Either (1) 'I cite in support of this the cases of . . .', or (2) 'I call to give their testimony in support of this. . .'

the fools of time] Either (1) 'those utter time-servers', or (2) 'those dupes of Time'.

14] 'Who, after a life-time of wrong-doing, renounce their time-serving' (or 'their criminal follies') 'to die for permanent values.'

13-14] Various allusions have been suggested, e.g. to Jesuit conspirators, to the Gunpowder Plot, to Essex and his followers, to Foxe's Martyrs. But the evidence for any of these is far too slight to carry conviction.

If my dear love were but the child of state,
 It might for Fortune's 'bastard be unfather'd,
 As subject to Time's love or to Time's hate,
 Weeds among weeds or flowers with flowers gather'd. 4
 No, it was builded far from accident;
 It suffers not in smiling pomp, nor falls
 Under the blow of thrall'd discontent
 Whereto the inviting time our fashion calls; 8
 It fears not policy, that heretic
 Which works on leases of short-number'd hours:
 But all alone stands hugely politic,
 That it nor grows with heat nor drowns with showers. 12
 To this I witness call the fools of time,
 Which die for goodness, who have liv'd for crime.

General Note on the Dark Woman Sonnets

There is a fair measure of agreement among scholars that Sonnets 127-52 form a group concerned mainly with the poet's relations (real or imaginary) with a dark woman (i.e. brunettë). As to her 'darkness' it is worth bearing in mind that at least until late in Elizabeth's reign, blonde beauty was the ideal in courtly and literary circles. The hair of Delia, however, who was the subject of a sonnet-sequence by Daniel, golden in 1592, had become black by 1601, and it seems possible that some shift in taste took place under French and Italian influence. Such a shift may be mirrored by lines 1-4 of Sonnet 127, though the tone of this and other sonnets of the group suggests that Shakespeare was also attacking the older convention which had not yet died.

As to the character of the Dark Woman, she appears in the poems as a voraciously lustful woman, possessive of her lovers. The poet's feelings for her are a three-fold blend of a tremendous sense of physical attraction, a revulsion from her moral viciousness, and a jealousy of her power over the Friend, whose affections she had also captured.

1 *In the old age*] 'Formerly'; not necessarily a long time ago.

1, 2] 'Formerly dark colouring was not considered beautiful' (with a play on 'blonde') 'or, if it was admired, it was not *called* beautiful.'

3 *successive heir*] 'heir by succession'.

4] 'And (blonde) beauty dubbed a bastard.'

5 *since*] Probably used in a temporal sense. If it meant 'because' it would be redundant with 'For'.

5, 6 *each . . . face*] 'everybody has usurped Nature's power and become able to paint up as a blonde (and also to make ugliness look beautiful)'.

7, 8] 'Fresh and natural blonde beauty is held neither in repute nor in reverence, but either its appearance is profanely assumed or it is utterly discredited.'

10 *brow*] The Quarto of 1609 reads *eyes* both in line 9 and in line 10—an obvious mistake. A parallel passage from *Love's Labours Lost*, IV, iii, 244-62, strongly suggests that *brow* (meaning the whole countenance) might be the word Shakespeare really wrote in line 10, and we therefore print *brow*.

suitèd] The word has two meanings here: (1) 'matched' (looking back to 'eyes' in line 9), and (2) 'dressed' (looking forward to 'mourners' in line 10).

they] referring both to 'eyes' (line 9) and 'brow' (line 10).

In the old age black was not counted fair,
 Or if it were it bore not beauty's name;
 But now is black beauty's successive heir,
 And beauty slander'd with a bastard shame: 4
 For since each hand hath put on Nature's power,
 Fairing the foul with Art's false borrow'd face,
 Sweet Beauty hath no name, no holy bower,
 But is profan'd, if not lives in disgrace. 8
 Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black,
 Her brow so suited, and they mourners seem
 At such who not born fair no beauty lack,
 Slandering creation with a false esteem: 12
 Yet so they mourn becoming of their woe,
 That every tongue says beauty should look so.

11 *At*] 'Over the case of.'

such . . . lack] i.e. those who have artificially acquired the blonde beauty they were not born with.

12 *creation*] 'nature's process of creating' (cf. 'Nature's power' (line 5)).

with . . . esteem] a difficult clause, which may possibly mean either (1) 'by giving the false impression that they can do what Nature does'; or (2) 'by preferring their own creation to Nature's'; or (3) 'by causing other people to have false standards of beauty'.

13] 'Yet they mourn in a way that so graces their woe . . .' Most modern editors (mistakenly, in our view) insert a comma after *mourn*, which separates 'so' too sharply from 'becoming', which it modifies.

14 *look*] both (1) 'have that colouring', and (2) 'have that expression'.

1-2] 'Lust', not 'expense', is the grammatical subject.

1 *expense*] 'expenditure' or, possibly, 'squandering' (see note on 'waste of shame', below).

spirit] primarily 'vital energy'—though the word also suggests 'spirituality', this quality being thought of as dissipated in the grossness of sensuality.

The primary sense noted above would refer to the subtle fluid or rarefied substance formerly supposed to course through the blood and to activate the chief organs of the body. It was of three kinds: 'animal', springing from the brain; 'vital', springing from the heart; and 'natural', originating in the liver. It is impossible to say whether the reference here is to one of these exclusively or generally to all.

waste of shame] Though most readers probably find that the lines suggest awareness of an aftermath of spiritual desolation, Shakespeare does not seem anywhere else to use 'waste' to mean 'desert'. Moreover, the sonnet is notably limited in physical imagery. The phrase probably therefore means 'shameful orgy' rather than anything like 'desert of shame in which vital energy is squandered'.

3 *full of blame*] 'packed with guilt', or, quite possibly, 'full of harm'. 'Blame' in either of these senses is a strong word here, and gathers further sense from its alliteration with 'bloody'.

4 *extreme*] 'going to all lengths'.

rude] 'brutal'.

not to trust] i.e. 'not to be trusted' (cf. *Twelfth Night*, III, iii, 18: 'What's to do?').

10 *in quest to have*] 'in pursuit of its prey'. There may well be an echo of the use of the term applied to hunting.

extreme] cf. note on line 4, above.

11 *in proof*] i.e. while having the desired experience.

prov'd] i.e. when the experience is over.

14 *the heaven*] Possibly referring both to (1) the experience of bliss, and to (2) the woman who provides it.

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and till action, lust
Is perjur'd, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust; 4
Enjoy'd no sooner but despisèd straight;
Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,
Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait
On purpose laid to make the taker mad,— 8
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof; and prov'd, a very woe;
Before, a joy propos'd; behind, a dream. 12
All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

This sonnet appears to be often misinterpreted. Contemporary poetry was full of extravagant and even absurd comparisons belauding a woman's beauty—of snowy breasts, of swansdown, of eyes that are 'fair suns that shine when Phoebus' eyes are gone' (cf. line 1), and 'Sweet lips of coral hue but silken softness' (cf. line 2). Shakespeare here is not concerned to say (as is often asserted) that his mistress is far from beautiful, nor even that her attractions are not of the conventional blonde and fair tones (dark colouring being unfashionable at least until late in Elizabeth's reign). He is satirically repudiating the popular false comparisons (the 'couplements of proud [and false] compare'); and by implication he affirms the physical reality of his mistress. Perhaps he also suggests that any desirable woman ('any she') would be 'belied' with any such 'false compare' as he satirizes.

4] A rather more elaborate satirical turn than the preceding lines. 'If you think it is praise to say your mistress' hairs are golden wires' (cf. Spenser, *Epithalamion*, line 154: 'Her long loose yellow locks like golden wire') 'I'll offer you a *reductio ad absurdum*: On my mistress' head black wires grow.'

5 *damask'd*] primarily here 'variegated' or 'patterned', as in the woven cloths so termed. But the association with 'roses' enriches the word. Though the original 'damask rose' was not variegated, but 'blush' or pink (the latter a word unknown to the Elizabethans as a colour term), Shakespeare may have been thinking of the 'Variegated Damaske' or 'York and Lancaster' rose described by seventeenth-century writers as variegated white and blush. The image would then be the patterning of cheeks in blush and white, thus blending the image of the cloth with that of the rose. A subsidiary train of associations might be the soft texture of the cloth and of rose petals. Such a variegation of hue in complexions was highly esteemed, the Elizabethan court circles considering an even complexion dull. Shakespeare will not praise his mistress as having the conventional colouring.

8 *reeks*] just 'exhales'—not the repulsive modern sense (which does not come in before the eighteenth century).

11 *go*] 'walk'—a common sixteenth-century meaning.

12 *treads on the ground*] i.e. like any other human being. She is real.

13 *I think my love as rare*] 'I think my mistress is as splendid a creature.'

14] 'As any woman who is misrepresented by false comparisons.'

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
 Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head: 4
 I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
 But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
 And in some perfumes is there more delight
 Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks: 8
 I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
 That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
 I grant I never saw a goddess go,—
 My mistress when she walks treads on the ground. 12
 And yet by heaven I think my love as rare
 As any she belied with false compare.

Shakespeare seems rashly to have sent his friend as intermediary to woo his mistress for him; whereon she has not only taken the Friend as her lover, but she has also alienated him from the poet, who would now offer anything, including the completest slavery to her, to get his friend back. But she is insatiable; she will not release the Friend, while she still holds complete sway over the poet; he has lost both ways. The situation is presented here in terms of a debtor, a guarantor and the grasping mortgagee.

2 *mortgag'd . . . will*] 'pledged to comply with your "will" and liable to forfeiture in case of failure'.

will] The word is played on here, and in some other sonnets addressed to the Dark Woman, with various senses, some offensive. Here the meanings are (1) 'volition', (2) 'wilfulness', (3) 'lust'.

3 *forfeit, so*] The poet, liable to forfeiture in any case, offers it at once *on terms*, viz that she will restore to him 'that other mine', his friend.

5 *he will not be free*] i.e. evidently the Friend is complaisant, and unwilling to relinquish his liaison with the mistress ('Will not' = 'does not want to', 'is unwilling to').

6 *covetous*] not 'desirous of what you have not got', but 'inordinately possessive of what you have'.

kind] 'complaisant'.

7] 'all he was instructed to do was to underwrite the bond as a surety for me' (i.e. 'to pledge my love and devotion to you').

8] i.e. the text of the bond, unknown to him, pledged his love and devotion too.

9] i.e. 'you will exact the full forfeiture provided for in the mortgage deed, which was drawn up for the sake of your beauty and the enjoyment of it'. (The full forfeiture was, of course, both the poet and his friend.)

10 *that . . . use*] 'who will give nothing except for interest'. There is an amatory innuendo in 'use'.

11 *came*] 'who became' (cf. *King Henry IV, Part 2*, II, iii, 57: 'So came I a widow').

12 *my unkind abuse*] 'your ill-usage of me', which gives a stronger sense than 'my misuse of my friend as a go-between', which would be platitudinous.

So, now I have confess'd that he is thine,
 And I myself am mortgag'd to thy will,
 My self I'll forfeit, so that other mine
 Thou wilt restore to be my comfort still. 4
 But thou wilt not, nor he will not be free;
 For thou art covetous, and he is kind;
 He learn'd but surety-like to write for me
 Under that bond that him as fast doth bind. 8
 The statute of thy beauty thou wilt take,
 Thou usurer, that putt'st forth all to use,
 And sue a friend came debtor for my sake;
 So him I lose through my unkind abuse. 12
 Him have I lost; thou hast both him and me:
 He pays the whole, and yet am I not free.

The paradoxical ironies of willing mutual deceit and self-deception.

1 *truth*, 2 *lies*] In both there is clearly a play on different senses.

2-3 *I do believe her . . . That*] This element in a brilliant poetic paradox is soon revealed, by the conjunction 'that' (= 'in order that'), to be a mere purposeful façade ('I pretend to believe her').

5 *vainly*] (1) 'in unfounded self-deception', and possibly (2) 'self-flatteringly'.

7 *Simply*] 'in assumed simplicity'—an ironic contrast with 'simple' in line 8.

9 *unjust*] primarily 'unreliable', but also 'untruthful'—paralleling the senses of 'truth' in line 1.

11 *love's . . . in*] 'love is best dressed up in'.

seeming] a favourite word of Shakespeare's for deceptive appearance.

12 *age in love*] Either 'age, when in love' or 'age, in the matter of love'. There may be a play on both senses.

told] primarily (1) 'reckoned', but possibly with a play on (2) 'divulged'.

13 *with*] By substituting 'with' for 'to' Shakespeare, with extravagant ingenuity, executes a *double entendre* in reverse.

14 *in our faults*] 'in respect of our shortcomings'.

When my love swears that she is made of truth
 I do believe her, though I know she lies
 That she might think me some untutor'd youth
 Unlearnèd in the world's false subtleties. 4
 Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
 Although she knows my days are past the best,
 Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:
 On both sides thus is simple truth suppress'd. 8
 But wherefore says she not she is unjust?
 And wherefore say not I that I am old?
 Oh, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
 And age in love loves not to have years told. 12
 Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,
 And in our faults by lies we flatter'd be.

The poet begs his mistress at least to *appear* to love him, even if she does not really do so.

1 *wise as*] 'as wise as'.

press] 'harass'.

4 *manner*] 'nature'.

pity-wanting] i.e. 'that gets no pity from you' (cf. 'cruel' (line 1)). 'Wanting' = 'lacking', not 'longing for'.

5 *wit*] i.e. a little practical wisdom.

6 *so*] i.e. 'that you *do* love me'.

8 *know*] i.e. are told.

11 *ill-wresting*] that gives a sinister twist to things.

13 *That . . . so*] 'So that I may not be believed'; as he would be if he were to despair and utter mad slanders.

14] It seems likely that there is an image from archery here.

go wide] deviate from the proper course.

*Be wise as thou art cruel: do not press
 My tongue-tied patience with too much disdain;
 Lest sorrow lend me words, and words express
 The manner of my pity-wanting pain. 4
 If I might teach thee wit, better it were,
 Though not to love, yet, love, to tell me so;—
 As testy sick men, when their deaths be near,
 No news but health from their physicians know. 8
 For if I should despair, I should grow mad,
 And in my madness might speak ill of thee.
 Now this ill-wresting world is grown so bad
 Mad slanderers by mad ears believèd be: 12
 That I may not be so, nor thou belied,
 Bear thine eyes straight though thy proud heart go wide.*

Few sonnets in the collection treat in a general way a moral or spiritual theme. This is the only sonnet which treats what may justifiably be called a 'religious' theme.

1-2] In the 1609 Quarto these lines read:

Poore~~e~~soule the center of my sinfull earth,
My sinfull earth these rebbell powres that thee array, . . .

This, with its unmetrical second line, looks so like a compositor's or copyist's mistaken repetition of words from the first line, that it has had very few defenders. The problem for any editor accepting it as mistaken is: What, then, to read? Three requirements appear to be basic:

1. The emended second line should be metrically correct.
2. The words should be taken from Shakespeare's known vocabulary.
3. They should be consonant with the sense and imagery of their context.

On one or more of these grounds most of the many emendations proposed must be ruled out. No one can be *certain* that his proposal is correct, for we have no MS or other authoritative alternative to the text of the 1609 Quarto. But after carefully considering every combination of any words Shakespeare has used in all his plays and poems, that would meet the above requirements, the present editors have decided to print the reading given here, which was first printed (though without any explanation being offered) by F. T. Palgrave in 1865. A full argument for this reading is given in our complete edition of the *Sonnets* (University of London Press, 1964).

1 *centre*] 'vital core'.

earth] 'body'.

2 *Foil'd by*] 'Frustrated by'. With this reading, since 'foil'd' was then pronounced approximately 'feel'd', a pun would be possible on 'fil'd' (then pronounced 'feel'd') meaning 'defiled'. This would parallel, and both strengthen and in turn derive strength from, the pun on 'array' (see below).

array] Not, as frequently interpreted, a military term meaning 'besiege' or 'beleaguer'. No such word can be found in English either in Shakespeare or elsewhere. There is probably a pun on two senses: (1) 'to dress', 'to attire' (cf. line 4), (2) 'to defile' (cf. 'sinful earth' and 'rebel powers', implying man's baser nature).

4] Probably not merely bodily adornment is meant, but all earthly show and indulgence.

5 *cost*] 'outlay'.

Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
 [Foil'd by] these rebel powers that thee array,
 Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,
 Painting thy outward walls so costly gay? 4
 Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
 Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
 Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
 Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end? 8
 Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
 And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
 Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
 Within be fed, without be rich no more: 12
 So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
 And Death once dead there's no more dying then.

6 *fading mansion*] i.e. the body, subject to decay.

7 *excess*] 'extravagance'.

8 *charge*] i.e. 'what you have spent so much on', and perhaps also 'what has been entrusted to you'.

9] i.e. he expects the soul to gain in health and strength by mortifying the body.

10 *aggravate*] 'increase'.

11 *terms*] in the legal sense of 'terms of years' (cf. 'lease' in line 5), here contrasted with the brevity of 'hours'.

13, 14] 'In this way you will feed on mortification and on mortality' (both ideas are probably present), 'and so on death itself, who feeds on men; and once death (= (1) 'your mortal body', (2) Death itself) 'is dead, there will be no more death for you to fear.'

A characteristic use of a 'conceited' analogy on which to construct a sonnet. The woman is false: to love her, a disease. In the fever of such a passion the sufferer rejects the advice of reason, the physician of the mind, and reason abandons him to madness—for it is madness to love someone so false, and only madness could have made him think her beautiful and honest.

1 *still*] 'incessantly'.

2 *nurseth*] 'nourishes' (not 'nurses').

3 *ill*] 'illness'.

4] i.e. to pander to the patient's fickle and unhealthy appetite.

6 *prescriptions*] 'instructions', 'orders' (not necessarily for medicaments, but possibly, for example, for abstinence).

kept] 'obeyed'.

7 *desperate*] 'in a state of desperation'.

approve] 'realize by experience'.

8] 'Physic' is probably the grammatical subject, not the object, of 'except'. (The inversion involved in taking it as object appears un-Shakespearean.) The sense would appear to be: 'In a state of desperation I am now learning by experience that desire, which medical skill forbade, means death'.

9] The case is past cure, *because* the physician has ceased to care. Shakespeare is not merely reproducing the proverb 'Past cure, past care', he is in effect inverting it and playing with it.

10 *evermore*] an adjective, 'continual'.

11 *discourse*] 'speech', rather than 'reasoning', seems to be the sense. Lines 12 and 13 continue a contrast between 'thoughts' and 'speech', whereas no such contrast between 'thoughts' (= 'concepts') and reasoning seems to be developed.

12] 'Wide of the mark and senselessly uttered.'

13, 14] There is a play on the physical and moral senses of 'fair', 'bright', 'bleak' and 'dark'.

My love is as a fever, longing still
 For that which longer nurseth the disease,
 Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
 The uncertain sickly appetite to please. 4
 My reason, the physician to my love,
 Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
 Hath left me, and I desperate now approve
 Desire is death, which physic did except. 8
 Past cure I am now reason is past care,
 And frantic mad with evermore unrest;
 My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,
 At random from the truth, vainly express'd: 12
 For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
 Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

Part 2

Some Characteristics of Elizabethan Vocabulary and Idiom

Ye know ek that in forme of speche is chaunge
Withinne a thousand year, and wordes tho
That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so,
And spedde as wel in love as men now do.

So wrote Chaucer nearly six hundred years ago; and we can see his point at once. More than spelling is involved, and the changes in pronunciation that this reflects. Words and idioms such as *tho* ('then'), *hadden pris* ('were held in esteem'), *wonder* as an adverb, *nyce* (here 'uncommon', or one sense of the modern 'quaint'), *straunge* (in modern spelling 'strange', but meaning 'foreign'—French *étranger*), and *us thinketh hem* (an impersonal construction, 'they seem to us')—all these we immediately sense to be now archaic or obsolete. Yet we recognize the truth slyly expressed in the last line and a half: word usage and the associations terms evoke may change, but human relations in basic things continue as successfully (or unsuccessfully) as ever.

Only three and a half centuries separate us from Shakespeare, not six: and we usually read him in a modernized spelling (as in this volume), which helps to make him look less 'nyce' or 'straunge' than Chaucer, and his vocabulary is certainly more modern. But this very fact may mislead us; for we may read many of these words in a modern sense, or with twentieth instead of sixteenth-century associations of ideas, and so misunderstand his whole meaning or miss a part of it. (This kind of misunderstanding is noticeable in some eighteenth and nineteenth-century editors' treatment of lines in these sonnets.) There are also some changes in grammatical usage between Elizabethan and modern English, though for understanding Shakespeare's meaning these are somewhat less frequently misleading than the changes in connotation or denotation of words—changes, that is, in some exactly definable sense of a word or in the associations it suggests.

Moreover, between an Elizabethan Englishman's speech habits and our

own lie differences greater than slight sense-shifts or the obsolescence of individual words. A smaller but expanding vocabulary was then joined to greater verbal sensitivity. Mere proliferation of words may work like monetary inflation which depreciates the individual coin. The more vital word-consciousness of the Elizabethan writer was not atrophied by day-and-night visual and auditory bombardment into devitalized casualness nor was his reader defensively armoured into verbal insensitivity. The contemporary exploitation of words was active and constructive, not the casual or deliberate debasement met in modern advertising, politics and journalism. 'Blurring' and 'blanket-words' are a recent epidemic. The Elizabethan writer bit his words as he bit his coins and examined their edges to see if they were counterfeit or clipped. Sometimes they were: indeed he was not averse to a little coining on his own to serve his ends, and merry little battles were fought between rival authors over one another's innovations. Few of us will now quarrel with Richard Puttenham for using *scientific* to contrast with the contemporary sense of *mechanical* when he wanted to distinguish 'a man of science liberall' from 'a handicrafts man' (even remembering that *science liberal* then meant studies we now classify on the 'Arts Side'), or for speaking of 'the conduct of whole armies' (he spelt it *conduict*) when he needed a word to apply 'onely to the leading of a Captaine, and not as a little boy should leade a blinde man'. Nor should we describe as 'darke and not usuall nor well sounding', or as 'straunge termes of other languages', such words as *method*, *methodical*, *function*, *refining*, *penetrate* and *penetrable*, *compendious*, *prolix*, *figurative*, *inveigle*, *impression*, *numerous*, *metrical*, *indignity*, *obscure*, *declination* or *dimension*. Yet in *The Arte of English Poesie*, published in 1589, Puttenham, in a passage censuring verbal innovators, feels it necessary to defend his own use of these and many other words. And we find the pamphleteer Thomas Nashe, whose lively and vigorous vocabulary of invective includes a number of words not introduced until a little before his time and now dropped from current use—such as *dunstically*, *dehortment*, *niggardise*—as well as some which we might now find more acceptable (*delegatory*, *thanksworthy*, *impierceable* will serve as examples of these)—being fiercely contemptuous of words used by his opponent

Gabriel Harvey which we now accept as common, such as *conscious*, *jovial*, *artificiality*, *notoriety* or *negotiation*. (A brief and lively account of some of these battles may be found in G. Gordon, *Shakespeare's English*, Society for Pure English Tract XXIX, Oxford, 1928.) Throughout all this controversy the essential feature of the Elizabethan writer's verbal reaction was vitality, his acute awareness of the word itself and its possibilities—of its derivation, of its primary or associative senses, of its possessing many facets of which, as he turned it round, he could be aware of more than one at a glance. Like a fine-cut diamond a word acquired its brilliance from its possession of so many faces in closely related planes.

But first, the Elizabethan is nearer *in time* to the derivation of the word—not necessarily just by pedantic consciousness, though such pedants there were. (Shakespeare, no pedant himself, offers us one in Holofernes of *Love's Labour's Lost*.) The modern reader must therefore equip himself to take words, especially those of foreign origin (e.g. Latin or French), in a more exact etymological sense than we bother to today. Shakespeare never uses *abuse* in its modern loose extension (possibly now the commonest sense) of 'insulting speech'; with him it signifies either 'misuse' or (hence) 'ill-usage and maltreatment' (from which our modern extension develops)—see Sonnets 121, line 10 and 134, line 12. The only Shakespearean meaning of *aggravate* is 'increase or enlarge' (see Sonnet 146, line 10), extending sometimes to 'exaggerate': it never means 'annoy' (which itself then meant 'do harm to'). *Astonish* (see Sonnet 86, line 8) which is a later variant of *astone*, 'to strike senseless by a blow', itself probably the origin of our *stun* by 'aphaeresis', or the dropping of the first syllable—had then a force of dismaying and stunning into silence stronger than it carries today. *Injury* (see Sonnet 40, line 12) now usually suggests bodily harm, but the Elizabethan felt it to imply more its etymological (and legal) sense of an injustice, the infringement of a right, and *injurious* in these poems is 'in-jurious'. *Disgrace* has now a sense of moral shame or of degradation in status, but the active force of the prefix was then more evident, and the sense, whether as verb or as noun, was more that of the removal of grace ('dis-grace'), and could, as in Sonnet 33, line 8, have a more simply physical suggestion than it could carry today.

A second adjustment the modern reader needs to make is to idiomatic change and often to technical usage and allusion. Technicalities of law, trade and education (e.g. terms of Rhetoric—see p. 162) which were commonplaces to Shakespeare's contemporaries are now strange to us, or are replaced by those of modern sciences, interests and gadgets. Every educated Elizabethan knew his terms of Rhetoric. Many had studied at the Inns of Court (used then as educational finishing schools of the upper classes much as the Universities were in the nineteenth century), and everyone seems at least to have been much more familiar (if often vaguely and inaccurately) with legal terms than we are now: the Elizabethan was certainly more legal-minded and often litigious. The terms of medicine and of science have changed. *Indigest* ('monsters and things indigest') has in Shakespeare a scientific connotation only very distantly related to modern dyspepsia: it means 'shapeless, formless, chaotic'. *Conquest* (see Sonnets 46, line 2 and 74, line 11) probably refers to 'real estate acquired otherwise than by inheritance' (as opposed to 'heritage'). Technical references to lease and tenure (e.g. *charge* in Sonnet 146, line 8) provide writers with vocabulary and imagery. *Invention* (see Sonnets 59, 76, 105) is a term in Rhetoric referring to the art of finding matter to write, the step which precedes *disposition* of the matter. A *closet*, such as that in which Antony found Caesar's will, or that which Lady Macbeth unlocked in her sleepwalking, would be variously a cabinet or a locked case, as well as sometimes a small inner room where privacy, so rare in Elizabethan houses, could be obtained. We have to familiarize ourselves with such terms of technical or particular meaning as much as with the few but very important changes of grammatical idiom and usage, if we are not at times entirely to misinterpret a passage or a whole poem.

Thirdly, the verbally conscious Elizabethan did not regard the play on words, the pun, as 'the lowest form of wit'. To him, as to many modern poets, verbal ambiguity was both the source and the means of expression for both intellectual and imaginative vitality. Elizabethan English had a much smaller vocabulary than even a moderate-sized modern dictionary: its power lay in the versatility, as well as the precision, with which its smaller armoury of weapons could be directed. Modern science and the

precise prose of statement require that inside the context of exact studies words should have 'uniqueness of reference'—in such writings each term has one, and only one, exact and definable 'meaning'. In such contexts prose that neglects this rule defeats its own end. As men approached these conditions of thought, while at the same time language was both expanding and loosening in everyday practice, it was natural for the pun to degenerate into a trivial and facetious plaything. It can be seen at its most horrific in such a book as the Hon. Hugh Rowley's *Puniana* (1886: 270 pages of excruciatingly crude puns—e.g. 'We had better close our book, and so had you (adieu!)'), or in the early issues of *Punch*. But the Elizabethan poet found this very quality of words, that they could simultaneously suggest two or more ways of thinking and feeling, a fertile device for imaginative subtlety and the expression of sensibility. Frequently he *intends* us to see two or more senses of a word or a phrase in one line: as the poem develops he may expand one, or more than one, of these senses or associations, perhaps looking back at the end of the poem to an association that has been used earlier and then left. This cross-referencing or counterpointing is an essential stylistic and structural element in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*: and while it demands some alertness from the reader it also makes difficulties for the editor who would present an edition for a modern public. For sixteenth/seventeenth-century spelling was not only freer (and more phonetic) than ours: custom did not demand consistency throughout one book or even poem. *Antic* or *antique* (*Sonnets* 19, line 10 and 106, line 7): *travail* or *travel* (*Sonnet* 27, line 2)—whichever spelling we adopt we obscure, for a modern reader accustomed to fixed spellings which distinguish the elements of each pair, the visual suggestion by the printed word of the alternative sense. For an examination of contemporary printing practice shows that no clear distinction was made; any consistency occurring would probably depend on the spelling habits of the individual compositor more than on the MS. The problem is not really to decide which is the 'right word', for the contextual sense in many cases clearly demands that we should be able to accept both senses at once. Unfortunately modern spelling militates against this type of intentional ambiguity. Another and allied feature is

the repetition of one word in clearly *distinguished* senses or moods within the same sonnet. Consider, for instance, the three occurrences of the word *state* in Sonnet 29 (lines 2, 10 and 14) where the word changes its whole tone and sense as the poem moves, like a structure in music, from the minor to the major key. In the complete 154 sonnets of Shakespeare there are over 40 words that are played on in some of these different ways, sometimes with considerable evocative effect. At the end of this book (p. 200) we print a score or so that most notably occur in this selection of 65 of the sonnets, with brief notes on their various senses. The feeling of an obligation to prescribe one and refute every other reading of each line governed most editors—even many of the best—in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the detriment of their appreciation of some of the poems.

Here are a half century of words, taken from this selection of the *Sonnets* alone, with which a modern reader must be wary, realizing the changes in meaning that have taken place or the specialized Elizabethan technical senses they bore. In the Glossary at the end of this book we have tried to include every word in the present poems presenting such difficulty, but the student will of course find many elsewhere in Shakespeare's poems and plays.

Legal Terms

conquest	Sonnet 74
control (vb.)	107
date	18
determination	13
enjoy	29
enlarge	70
injurious	44, 63
statute	134

Medical or Physiological

blood	Sonnet 11, 21
complexion	18, 99
element	44
hue	104
nurse (vb.)	147
prescription	147
spirit(s)	98, 129

Literary and Rhetorical

invention	59
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Clothing

jollity	66
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Words of General Use

abuse (n.)	121, 134	mark (n.)	70, 116
accident	124	map	68
against	13, 49, 63	memorial	74
approve	147	policy	124
art	29, 66	politic	124
brave	12, 15	quick	55
comfort (n.)	134	rude	11, 129
composed	59	sad	56, 65, 107
conceit	108	shadow	27, 53, 98
convert	49	stain (vb.)	33
counterfeit	53	triumph	52
debate (vb.)	15	triumphant	33
dial	104	unhappily	66
disgrace	33	wanton	97
insult (vb.)	107	wink (vb.)	36
		wit	59, 140

Shakespeare's Diction in the Sonnets

Let us consider some aspects of Shakespeare's choice of words in the *Sonnets*.

It would be a great mistake to think that Shakespeare's most telling effects in these poems are always achieved by the use of out-of-the-way words. Many of his most striking effects result from using entirely simple, everyday words, though this is frequently because the words are charged by their context with meanings more powerful than they usually bear.

Ah yet doth beauty like a dial hand
Steal from his figure, and no pace perceiv'd.
(Sonnet 104, lines 9-10)

But be contented when *that fell arrest*
Without all bail shall carry me away.
(Sonnet 74, lines 1-2)

Was it the *proud full sail* of his great verse
(Sonnet 86, line 1)

The double or multiple meanings the italicized words carry in their context give added weight to common terms.

The ordinary words, however, do not always rely on any extra charge of meaning for their effect. Take, for instance, the final couplet of Sonnet 71, which consists almost entirely of monosyllabic words, and *entirely* of ordinary words:

Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
And mock you with me after I am gone.

Here the effect is not due to any specially powerful sense imparted to any particular words by their context. The 'tellingness' depends mainly on two factors: 1. that the couplet introduces for the first time, and as a kind of surprise, the reason why the poet does not wish his friend to mourn him after his death; and 2. that the simple, plain words express the sincerity of the bitter reason. *None of the individual words draws attention*

to itself as the bearer of any special effect; all taken together express the thought and feeling intended, with the utmost clarity.

Shakespeare does, however, also use elaborate words to good effect, and even invents new ones, especially compound words, e.g. *fore-bemoanèd* (Sonnet 30, line 11), *swart-complexion'd* (Sonnet 28, line 11), *proud-pied* (Sonnet 98, line 2), *steep-up* (Sonnet 7, line 5), *pity-wanting* (Sonnet 140, line 4). There are a fair number of these in the *Sonnets*, though Shakespeare does not overdo the trick.

Long words are, however, in fact pretty infrequent in the *Sonnets*. Four-syllable words are few (only 26 in 154 poems), and five-syllable words still fewer (only two); but when a long word does occur it generally carries an impressive weight. In

Book both my wilfulness and errors down,
And on just proof surmise accumulate.

(Sonnet 117, lines 9-10)

the final polysyllable forms the bitter climax of the two lines, while in 'Beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity' (Sonnet 62, line 10) and in 'rocks impregnable' (Sonnet 65, line 7) the long words match by their length the importance of the meaning they bear. A particularly successful use of a four-syllable word is that of *determinate* in Sonnet 87, line 4:

The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
My bonds in thee are all determinate.

where the word *determinate* gives an impression of firm finality to the poet's renunciation of any claims on his friend's love.

Besides inventing new words Shakespeare also employs words previously used only as some different part of speech, e.g. *canopy* as a verb in Sonnet 12, line 6. He also gives new meanings to old words, e.g. to *repair* (Sonnet 3, line 3) as a noun, making it mean 'condition (or state) of repair'. In all these ways Shakespeare shows himself a linguistic innovator.

Shakespeare's power over language, however, is still more strikingly evident in the splendid and subtle combinations which he achieves

between words. Let us consider a few instances. The first sonnet of all gives us a Shakespearean coinage, *self-substantial* in line 6:

Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel

i.e. fuel derived from its own substance. The coined word is typical of the compound words Shakespeare loved so well. It is also typical in its compactness, for it is Shakespeare's habit to pack much meaning into few words. Still more important, however, is the part the word plays in the sound of the line. We must always, indeed, think of Shakespeare as a great master of sound. The sound of this line has a definitely haunting effect, and it is worth noticing how the compound word contributes to this:

Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel

Apart from that compound word there are three other *fs* in the line, three other *ls* and two other *ts* and *ss*. The word therefore fits harmoniously into the consonantal atmosphere. This is a subtler thing than simple alliteration on the initial sounds of words, though that also is present in the rest of the line, as well as in the compound word itself. Another particularly attractive effect of the same kind (this time not with a compound word) occurs in Sonnet 21, line 5:

Making a couplement of proud compare

Here the well-distributed *ms*, in *making*, *couplement* and *compare*, play a principal role, and so do the *k* sounds in the same three words; and the rest is done by the *ps* in *couplement*, *proud* and *compare*, and to a lesser degree by the *rs* in *proud* and *compare*. The reversal of *p* and *m* in *couplement* and *compare* is a subtly fascinating touch.

Another aspect of the diction of the *Sonnets* is that there are a good many abstract and general words. It would be a great mistake to think of the *Sonnets* as almost exclusively concrete and particular poetry. The abstract and general words are sometimes long and artificial, e.g. *distillation* (Sonnet 5, line 9), *masonry* (as an abstract term meaning the art or skill of masons) (Sonnet 55, line 6), *sufferance* (Sonnet 58, line 7), *antiquity*

(Sonnets 62, line 10 and 108, line 12), *interchange of state* (Sonnet 64, line 9), *infection* (Sonnet 67, line 1), *intelligence* (Sonnet 86, line 10), *misprision* (Sonnet 87, line 11), *incertainty* (Sonnet 115, line 11), *salutation* (Sonnet 121, line 6), *retention* (Sonnet 122, line 9). There are also a good number of abstract words shorter than these, such as, for example, the words which recur again and again in the *Sonnets*—*beauty* and *truth*.

Once again, however, it is the combination of the abstract or general terms with other words which is especially noteworthy. In this connection it is worth noting a characteristic way in which Shakespeare gives life to abstract terms. It is actually only in the case of a few abstractions, including Time and Death, and Winter and Summer (in Sonnet 56), and the abstractions of Sonnet 66 ('Tir'd with all these . . .') that a full effect of personification is given. On the other hand, many of the abstract or general terms are juxtaposed with concrete terms in such a way that the concepts they express are given some measure of animated life. In Sonnet 5, lines 9-10, for instance, 'summer's distillation' is 'left/A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass'. *Remembrance* is summoned up as a witness (Sonnet 30, line 2); *mortality* (Sonnet 65, line 2) *o'ersways* the power of *brass*, *stone*, *earth* and *boundless sea*; *ruin teaches* the poet to *ruminate* (Sonnet 64, line 11); *shame* blushes and *despair* is white (Sonnet 99, line 9); 'incertainties . . . crown themselves assur'd,/And peace proclaims olives of endless age' (Sonnet 107, lines 7-8). Though this animation seldom develops into a full personification, the juxtaposition of the abstract and general terms with the concrete terms, especially where these are 'down-to-earth', has often a virile effect which is especially characteristic. Some of the most striking examples occur in sonnets not included in this selection, e.g.

I will acquaintance strangle (Sonnet 89, line 8)

and

Mine appetite I never more will grind
On newer proof to try an older friend.

(Sonnet 110, lines 10-11)

But we might cite *sin* that *laces itself* with the friend's *society* (Sonnet 67,

line 4) or the poet's *love* which does not fall 'Under the blow of thrallèd discontent' . . .

But all alone stands hugely politic,
That it ~~nor~~ grows with heat nor drowns with showers.
(Sonnet 124, lines 6-7 and 11-12)

To pass to an entirely different aspect of the diction of the *Sonnets*: Certain favourite words recur again and again, and so contribute greatly to the atmosphere and tone of the *Sonnets* taken as a corpus of writing. Let us consider simply adjectives, nouns and verbs. There are three adjectives that occur particularly frequently, and they do certainly make their mark on one's total impression of the *Sonnets*. The adjectives concerned are *sweet*, which occurs over 50 times, *fair*, which occurs about 50 times, and *true*, which occurs about 40 times; and there is also *dear*, which occurs about 25 times. These positive, gentle, one might even say *loving* adjectives, strewn through the poems, have an undeniable effect. Whatever harsh and painful impressions the *Sonnets* may contain, the discordant notes never win completely against these positives.

When we turn to nouns the results are, perhaps, not quite so striking, but Shakespeare mentions again and again the big generalities of life, life itself, day and night, men, truth, time, beauty and, above all, love. Further, once again it is the positive impressions that dominate, despite time. A similar impression of the ultimate *dominance of the positives* comes from a count of the verbs.

In general we could say that in point of diction we find several kinds of excellence in the *Sonnets*. The value of the words sometimes consists simply in their clarity, and despite all that has been rightly indicated of obscurity and complexity in these poems, it must also be recognized that a *fair deal* of the writing is, as Benson said in his Preface to his pirated edition in 1640, 'serene, cleere and elegantly plaine'. On a higher level, however, other effects are achieved by the *strength* of the language: by such punching words as *blunt* and *bloody*, 'Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws' (Sonnet 19, line 1); 'But wherefore do not you a mightier

way/Make war upon this bloody tyrant Time?' (Sonnet 16, lines 1-2)—and such strongly resistant words as *stout* and *impregnable*. On the other hand—and this is again a measure of the range of mood, many effects are achieved by *gentle refinement* of diction—e.g. besides *sweet*, *fair* and *true*, such expressions as *perfumèd tincture* or clauses like 'they live unwoo'd and unrespected fade'. Again, sometimes what strikes us is largely the *sound effect* of the words themselves, as in *carcanet* in the line 'captain jewels in the carcanet' (Sonnet 52, line 8). Yet again, sometimes the striking thing is the *appropriateness* of the word, either as a description of what it expresses, or for its relation, phonal or semantic, with its context. All these kinds of effects (and there may be found other kinds, too) are different, and they all occur in great profusion in the *Sonnets*, and together go a long way (although not all the way) to constitute the excellence of the diction.

Finally it is worth mentioning briefly an important characteristic of the sentence structure and word order of the *Sonnets*. The straightforwardness of the syntax and word order are still greater than that which we have commented on in the individual words. They are seldom tortuous. Shakespeare's *Sonnets* belong to an 'artificial' kind of poetry in one sense of that word—that is to a poetry that openly employs artifice: and we might expect to find a good deal of disturbance of the word order of everyday conversation. Yet on a rough count only about one line in ten disturbs the 'natural' order of words—the order we might expect in unpremeditated discourse. Nearly all of these instances are very slight and are closely connected with achieving emphasis by repositioning words or phrases: and it is worth noting that the poems which contain most instances of 'disturbed' or unusual word order are frequently those where the thought or 'conceit' (see p. 165, below) is most consciously 'contrived'.

Shakespeare and Elizabethan Rhetoric

The word 'rhetoric' (perhaps still more so the adjective 'rhetorical') has today become somewhat debased and narrowed from its earlier meaning. To us 'rhetoric' too easily suggests unsoundly 'high-flown' speech or writing—emotional and exaggerated. We have come perhaps to value too much what appears to be 'spontaneous' and often is merely unconsidered. But Shakespeare and his contemporaries were trained at school to value speech and writing that were deliberately contrived for effect: they were drilled in its rules, and as readers or hearers were quick to take note of their application. To appreciate Elizabethan literature we must be alert to this fact.

Rhetoric formed the third part of the *Trivium*, the three Liberal Arts whose study and exercise comprised the school curriculum: Grammar, the art of the correct accidence and syntax of a language; Logic, the art of the correct development of reasoning; and Rhetoric, the art of persuasion. Logic and Rhetoric together formed the art of communication, the precepts and practice of which had to be mastered once Grammar had been learnt. To an Elizabethan the term 'artificial', applied to writing, was a term of praise. And as T. W. Baldwin puts it in his book *William Shakespeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*:

William Shakespeare was trained in the heroic age of grammar school rhetoric in England, and he shows knowledge of the complete system, in its most heroic proportions.

There were five parts of Rhetoric: *Invention*, or 'topics', was the finding of themes to write about (as in Sonnet 59, line 3). *Disposition* was the organization of one's material. *Elocution* (something quite different from the modern sense in which we use it in speaking of 'elocution lessons'), taught 'figures' of speech or thought—i.e. deviations from the ordinary and simple method of speaking or thinking about the subject; these might take the form of *tropes* (e.g. metaphor) or of *schemes* (e.g. deliberately unusual syntactical arrangement). These are the three Arts that are most

relevant to appreciating written composition. The other two, *Memory* and *Delivery* (the latter more like the modern meaning of 'elocution') are self-explanatory and refer to spoken and not to written communication. How thorough Tudor and Elizabethan writers on Rhetoric could be in their analysis of the various aids to writing may be indicated by the fact that a conflation of contemporary lists of 'figures' alone reveals an armoury of about 200 such weapons at the writer's disposal.

Almost every conceivable device of vocabulary and trope is catalogued by these 'figurists' in technical terms contrived from Greek and Latin. It would be pointless here to go through the *Sonnets* quoting and naming all the 'figures' used: what we need to recognize is that to Shakespeare's contemporaries such conscious writing was praiseworthy—it was 'artificial' in the best sense, viz that it displayed conscious 'art' or technical skill. A few examples will suffice, though the modern reader will not recognize (or probably feel any need or desire to remember) the rhetoricians' technical terms.

In Sonnet 116, lines 2-4 and 9-12 exemplify *Horismus*, or definition by what a thing is not, and by impugning that, rather than by precise definition. Sonnet 29, lines 5-8, and Sonnet 66 employ *Enumeratio*, the inventorying of a thing by its parts or of a subject by its adjuncts. In Sonnet 104, lines 3-7 exemplify the device *Exergasia* or *Expolitio*, the repetition of the same thought in many figurative forms or instances: and Sonnets 63 and 64 the device *Epanados*, a figure similar to *Prolepsis* (the amplification of a general statement by dividing it into its parts), but differing from it in repeating the terms of the general proposition (here in each case announcing the ravages of time) by particularizing it with examples.

Likewise passage after passage of the plays is more fully illuminated if we can analyse its structure according to the rules of Rhetoric. To cite only one example usually more familiar for its text than for an analysis of its form, in *Twelfth Night* Malvolio's confirmation of his hopes by observing Olivia's reactions when he comes before her in yellow stockings and cross-gartered follows correctly and in detail the rules for rhetorical composition of a *Confirmatio*. Malvolio was no ignorant manservant but a

serving-gentleman overproud of his accomplishments. Elsewhere in the plays the deliberate misuse of syllogistic or other logical sequences in order to establish an absurd conclusion provides Shakespeare's clowns with a familiar source of humour which would be immediately recognized in its technicalities by the sophisticated in his audience—and they were many.

Shakespeare would have learnt at school, by writing his 'Latins' and 'Vulgars' (compositions and translations) and learning his tropes and figures, to communicate according to the accepted rules. He applied this training to the writing of his native tongue and relied on his auditors' (or in the poems his readers') familiarity with the rules, for their recognition and appreciation of the 'art' he was employing.

*Shakespeare's Use of Imagery in the Sonnets,
and its Relation to the Structure and Texture*

'IMAGE' AND 'CONCEIT'

The terms 'image' and 'imagery' occur frequently in the discussion of poetry; but students' writing often reflects some confusion as to their meaning. Let us then be clear what we are talking about when we speak of 'Shakespeare's Use of Imagery'.

Certainly the word 'imagery' is often used of the imitation or representation of objects—the pictorial elements in design; and much poetry, especially of certain periods, contains descriptive material of this nature. But as a modern critical term we do not employ it in this simple pictorial sense: poetry is not just 'painting pictures with words'. 'Imagery', in the language of literary criticism, is 'the descriptive representation of *ideas*', not of objects. It is 'figurative illustration'; and in this any pictorial element may be subordinate to the associative emotional or intellectual relation—so subordinate, indeed, that visualization may in fact be superfluous or even irrelevant. In the poetry of Donne, for example, we find many 'images', but rather few essentially visual impressions. The relation between the thought and the image which illustrates it is *logically* developed, often with great intricacy, but Donne's poetry does not offer us 'pictures in verse' as, for example, does that of Tennyson. Tennyson's use of accurately observed detail in description is a commonplace: Keats loads his poetry with descriptive passages that evoke all our sensory responses, including the visual: eighteenth-century poetry is full of direct descriptions of scenery; but scenic description is not 'imagery' in the sense we are speaking of here.

Even where 'images' are employed, they differ greatly in their character and manner of working. Compare the following passages, the first from Tennyson, the second from Donne:

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares

Upon the great world's altar stairs
That slope through darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

(In Memoriam)

But I am by her death (which word wrongs her)
Of the first nothing the Elixir grown:

Where I a man, that I were one
I needs must know; I should prefer,

If I were any beast,
Some ends, some means; yea plants, yea stones, detest,
And love; all, all, some properties invest;
If I an ordinary nothing were,
As shadow, a light and body must be here.

(A Nocturnal upon St Lucy's Day)

In the Tennyson passage the image expresses a central Victorian sense of insecurity by means of a welter of vividly apprehended physical sensations. In the Donne passage the images work quite differently. There is very little of physical sensation or sensory impression. The figurative illustration relies on the intellectual agility with which the poet ranges the whole scale of being, in his search for a satisfying analogy to his present state of desolation. Thus both passages convey powerful feeling, but they do so by entirely diverse employment of imagery.

The most obvious, and the most superficial, use of imagery is by way of mere ornamentation or inflation: of superimposing ornateness upon plain speech. Second-rate writing and mere 'versification' is full of it: we can see it, for example, in a seventeenth-century juvenile paraphrase of a Psalm:

The sea saw that, and fled: Jordan was driven back.

(Ps. 114, v. 3)

becomes:

That saw the troubl'd Sea, and shivering fled,
And sought to hide his froth-becurl'd head
Low in the earth: Jordan's clear streams recoil,
As a faint host that hath receiv'd the foil.

or in one of the poorer eighteenth-century versifiers:

When black-brow'd Night her dusky mantle spread,
And wrapt in solemn gloom the sable sky.

(Contrast 'Swallows with spools of black thread sewing the shadows together'.) With this sort of thing we need concern ourselves no further.

A more interesting decorative use of imagery occurs when the image takes the form of a 'conceit' (though it is important to bear in mind that a 'conceit' does not necessarily involve an image). A 'conceit' is a neat or 'witty' treatment of a thought by means of 'figurative or fanciful representation'. (Note, by the way, that the word *conceit* is really the same as the word *concept*.) Here is a very simple example consisting of four rudimentary 'conceits' which together form a single composite 'conceit':

April is in my mistress' face,
And July in her eyes hath place;
Within her bosom is September:
But in her heart a cold December.

Granted the initial 'conceit' of the first line ('the freshness of spring is in my love's features') and the development of the seasonal association ('her eyes have the beauty of full summer'), the third line ('there is autumn's ripeness in her bosom') is an all-too-obvious next step: and the fourth line positively writes itself! Here is the 'conceit' in its slightest—we might say 'crudest'—shape. (The lines are those of a Madrigal, a song where several voices move in free parts against one another, so we could scarcely demand subtlety and intricacy of words or thought, which would be lost in the interplay of voices.) But the 'conceit' is capable of much greater depth and subtlety than this, and though overworked by minor poets

from Tudor to Restoration times, in the hands of the greater poets it could be the medium of keen perception and genuine and deep emotion.

The 'fancy' involved in a conceit may be purely verbal, as in Sonnet 147, line 9:

Past cure I am now reason is past care

where there is a verbal play on the two phrases 'past cure' and 'past care', both in the echo of 'cure . . . care', and in the use of 'past' in two senses, the first 'past' meaning 'too late for' and the second meaning 'beyond'.

On the other hand, a conceit may involve one or more images more or less extensively developed. Yet in such cases the conceits are not *themselves* simply the images, but the images in application. The essential thing is that these should prove a 'good fit' to the ideas they clothe: they must 'set off' the thoughts as a well-fitted garment 'sets off' a figure. Mere ingenuity in conceits, as in design, calls attention to itself, and may well be sadly out of harmony with the subject-matter, as in Cowley's lines on the Magdalen's eyes, lines which Dr Johnson so severely censured:

Two walking baths, two weeping motions,
Portable and compendious oceans.

(This, by the way, is Cowley at his worst. At his best, as in his lines on *Hope* or in his *Ode to Wit*, the aptness of his conceits is as striking as their ingenuity.) A good instance of an Elizabethan 'conceited' poem is Sonnet 49 of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, the one beginning:

I on my horse, and Love on me doth try
Our horsemanships, while by strange work I prove
A horseman to my horse, a horse to Love.

and the reader will have no difficulty in recognizing conceits of varying merit and success in some of the Shakespeare sonnets here selected.

THE APPLICATION OF IMAGES

The method of applying an image varies greatly. It may function as a straight *analogy*, and as such is often a direct simile:

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end.

(Sonnet 60, lines 1-2)

or

How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!

(Sonnet 97, lines 1-2)

It need not, however, take the form of a simile. Four of those sonnets in this selection that begin 'When . . .' (nos. 12, 15, 64 and 106) introduce an image that, though not a simile, is employed to promote an analogy with the poet's theme or experience. Or the image may be projected one stage further towards identification with the idea or experience itself, and become a metaphor:

Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,
Bound for the prize of all-too-precious you . . .

(Sonnet 86, lines 1-2)

Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn . . .

(Sonnet 68, line 1)

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,

(Sonnet 30, lines 1-2)

Yet even at this stage it may remain on the level of simple analogy in respect of its application, and not involve the neatness or 'wit' of a 'conceit'. In the *Sonnets* Shakespeare applies images both on this level and in 'conceits'; and, indeed, combines images of all kinds in more complex patterns, some of which we shall consider presently. Not all the sonnets contain images. Some operate very well in generalities and abstractions, e.g. no. 138:

When my love swears that she is made of truth
I do believe her, though I know she lies,

but the vast majority *do* contain images; and some contain a number. Shakespeare's very individual ways of combining images are of particular interest, as we hope to make clear.

SOURCES OF IMAGERY IN THE SONNETS

Undoubtedly a great deal of the power and value of the *Sonnets* as works of art lies in their imagery. This is drawn from many different spheres—from nature, especially the sun, day and night, the seasons, weather, the sea, flowers, and the life of birds; from farming; from the world of business, buying and selling, borrowing and lending; from feudal relationships; from the law, its courts, its trusts, its judgments, its legacies; from the life of the family, and domestic affairs; from the ownership of property, real and personal; from the playhouse; from drawing and painting; from war; from medicine; from eating and drinking; from politics; in one or two instances from music. There are few lyric poets who within the scope of 2,155 lines (one sonnet has 15 and one only 12 lines) have called upon so wide a range of phenomena and of human activity to provide them with images. How does Shakespeare employ these images? Does he use them most characteristically as 'conceits', as simple as our madrigal of the seasons or as intricate and as logically developed as many of Donne's? Are there qualities that individualize his treatment of images?

IMAGE AND STRUCTURE IN THE SONNETS

In as far as they affect the structure of the sonnet there are several characteristically Shakespearean 'movements' or progressions, but there is no one single and unvaried 'Shakespearean sonnet pattern'. Some sonnets (e.g. nos. 7, 14, 27) develop a single image through the three quatrains, 'working a conceit out' through twelve lines and concluding with a couplet that 'points', applies, or else answers it. In others (e.g. 11, 98, 106) the single image employed is enunciated in the first quatrain, and focused or expounded in its especial relevance to the situation, in the second quatrain. A variation of this movement occurs in no. 18, where the focus

is achieved in the sestet; while in others, like 19 and 33, the third quatrain focuses the image of the octave (in 19 of Time the devourer, and in 33 of the clouding of a fine day), and is followed by an answer or conclusion in the couplet—this being a very typical movement. Sonnet 53 represents a different treatment of the ‘single image’ sonnet, for the image enunciated in the first quatrain is thereafter *particularized* through the next two, the couplet offering a concluding thought.

On the other hand, a number of sonnets employ double or multiple images, and here in especial some characteristics of Shakespeare’s highly individual treatment of imagery become evident. Sonnet 15 provides a basic example. We begin with a quatrain the metaphor of whose third and fourth lines presents the condition of man at the level of analogy:

When I consider every thing that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment,
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;

This is followed by a quatrain whose image *parallels* that of the first: but it is a parallel with a difference; for the image that in lines 3 and 4 was offered on the analogical level is replaced by one that brings man now into direct fellowship with the natural world that had previously stood remote as spectator—albeit a spectator that ‘commented’ and had ‘secret influence’:

When I perceive that men as plants increase,
Cheerèd and check’d even by the selfsame sky,
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
And wear their brave state out of memory:

This is neither the superficial extension of a conceit, such as that of the madrigal we quoted, nor a logical exploitation of the former image in the manner of Donne. It is a progression into a different though not inconsequent image—the sky that ‘cheers and checks’ is the same sky whose stars ‘comment’ on man’s actions or ‘shows’ on ‘this huge stage’ the world: but with the progression we have moved deeper and closer

into the human condition and the poet's contemplation of it. And in the sestet we are made to apply this reflection intimately to the poet, his friend, and the perpetual war of Time with youth and beauty:

Then the conceit of this inconstant stay
Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
Where wasteful time debateth with decay
To turn your day of youth to sullied night:
And all in war with Time for love of you,
As he takes from you I engraft you new.

The vocabulary is still drawn from nature and the universe—'day', 'night', 'engraft'. But from the remote, impersonal spectatorship of the stars we have moved to the active partisanship—in the war with Time—of the love of friend for friend: and the images have shifted to match this movement.

Sonnet 86 follows a not dissimilar movement, though here the sestet submits an answer to the paralleled first quatrains rather than offers an application of them. But in this sonnet we may note another characteristically Shakespearean trait—and one that is often misunderstood. The succession of images, when examined, offers a quite notable incongruity of literal or logical sequence. The stately motion of the rival poet's *galleon* of lines 1 and 2 has apparently by lines 3 and 4 performed the feat of *burying* the poet's 'ripe thoughts' within the poet's own brain. The next quatrain forgets the 'tall ship' image still further, and considers the rival directly as a powerful 'spirit'; an image continued in the first quatrain of the answering sestet. And the couplet, with its final counter, turns to the terms of rhetoric for its language. There is certainly an *emotional* consistency throughout this development. But any *logical* development of one image, or any rational sequence of conceptually coherent images, is absent. The splendour of the opening lines, the power of the individual images, the resonance of the lines themselves, may blur our perception of their incongruity; and the emotional flow of the whole may ultimately satisfy us; but it is no good pretending that there is here a complete intellectual coherence of image and language. Logic, in fact, is more

involved in a conceit than in this sort of succession of images. The rapid succession of images in Shakespeare sometimes appears almost random, and the association that suggests them to him is often a loose one, or more emotional or verbal than strictly logical.

Sometimes, indeed, this succession is that of several differing but consistent or parallel images reinforcing the first, as in nos. 90 and 130. Sonnet 66 offers an unusual structure of parallels accumulated through eleven lines (2–12), with no octave/sestet division, the couplet providing the comment or reply. But one of the most striking examples of rapidly succeeding images occurs in Sonnet 60. We begin with a 'straight' simile: the passing minutes of our life are compared to the incoming wavelets as the tide 'makes'. (Note that it is the *making* tide of time, not the *ebbing* of life: time to Shakespeare is the *active* enemy, the eroder or destroyer):

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.

But the next quatrains not only shift the image from the incoming tide: they themselves include a rapid succession of shifts that on the literal plane are startlingly inconsistent, but gain coherence when one sees just what is happening to produce them:

Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crookèd eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth;
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.

The images shift rapidly from the tide to 'Nativity'—to light—to 'crown-ing' with 'maturity'—to eclipses (that 'fight')—to gifts destroyed by the giver: then with the personification of Time they move, from the giver

and destroyer of gifts, to a dart thrower—to a digger of trenches—to a devouring cankerworm—to a reaper. It all sounds splendid—and then looks most confusing. What has happened?

Shakespeare starts, pretty typically, by using the abstract and general term *Nativity* for the concrete, new-born child, who, after emerging into the world of light, *crawls* to maturity. Glancing over our shoulder we may recall that the *shore* of line 1 was a *pebbled*, not a rocky shore: the making tide comes here in wavelets, not in great stormy breakers, and it is the scarcely perceptible passage—the ‘crawling’—of our minutes that is paralleled, just as we may scarcely notice from day to day how steadily the toddler is growing up. *Crawls* seems to look three ways at once. And ‘the *main* of light’? The *main* is ‘the main ocean’: as the tidal basin fills we find our vessel not at the verge but afloat, on the ‘main’ of the sea—or of life: and the *main of light* is that of the child’s independent existence after birth.

But since the term *Nativity* has also the astrological sense of the moment of birth in relation to the conjunction of planets and their position in the Twelve Houses, the imagery next (i.e. in line 7) moves to celestial bodies and their eclipses. *Light*, *maturity*, *crown’d* are also associated in Shakespeare with the ascent of the ‘royal’ sun, and that in turn often with ‘clouds and eclipses’ that threaten or obscure it (cf. Sonnets 7 and 33). The banefulness of the war of the *crookèd eclipses* against mature man naturally leads to the idea of Time, the great enemy, and the sequence we noted above follows its course of associations.

Here then we have, not a ‘witty conceit’, logically developed, but an emotional or tonal evocation or association of images. This habit of Shakespeare’s mind—that of loose association in place of logical progression—often results, as here, in his images not being developed as conceits, but into and by a progression which may make a poem very powerful emotionally and even retain a *tonal* harmony while being logically inconsequent, or in thought-sequence tangential. Contrast, for example, Sonnet 60 with Sonnets 64 and 65, where the images do not in this way strike off at a tangent, and with such completely ‘conceited’ sonnets as nos. 44 and 99. What we shall then see is that sometimes Shakespeare’s mind swings suddenly away from the image he has first

created, as under the influence of some loose or secondary association of his own words the logic gets skewed. There are a number of instances of this kind of distortion in the *Sonnets*. They are worth keeping a look out for as we read. One doesn't admire the sonnets concerned much less after noticing such things: one admires them differently. One admires the vitality of the images and impressions as they arise, one admires the firm and powerful movement of the verse, one admires the clear, strong, striking or appropriate diction. One knows, or one thinks one knows, Shakespeare's poetic processes better.

THE QUALITY OF THE IMAGES

If one compares the imagery of the *Sonnets* with the imagery of Donne's *Songs and Sonets* one finds in Shakespeare's work few or no images of the boldness of Donne's celebrated compass image or his suggestion, in the poem called *A Fever*, that the mistress's fever is the fire that the schools of philosophy had tried to identify as that which destroyed the world at the end of each cycle. Nor are the images often drawn from learned or subtle allusions. Nor is there any outrageously fantastic development of images round a preposterous centre, as in Donne's poem *The Flea*. There are, indeed, some uncanny images in the *Sonnets*. Shakespeare, like Donne, is fascinated with the idea of things which feed on and consume themselves:

But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel.

(Sonnet 1, lines 5-6)

And he has some love of paradox and much of antithesis, and this sometimes leads to strange effects, as (again in Sonnet 1):

Within thine own bud buriest thy content.

The juxtaposition of the 'bud', the promise of life, with burial, the aftermath of death, has something almost Spanish about it. It reminds one of that skull in a glass case in the Sacristy of the Cathedral at Avila, which has small roses in the sockets of the eyes, and in the mouth. The diametrically opposite effect is achieved in Sonnet 146, in the image of the soul feeding on Death. But although the juxtapositions of images are

sometimes uncanny in this way, the images themselves are, in general, not particularly *recherché*, and often entirely usual. Sometimes, indeed, as in Sonnet 73, an obvious image, such as that of autumn, or twilight, or the embers of a fire, for advancing age, is given some special twist. The addition of the cathedral image at the end of the first quatrain, of the stealing of the twilight by the thief, black night, the second self of Death, in the second quatrain, and the image of the deathbed in the third, fascinatingly and successfully complicate the basic images; but neither the basic images themselves nor the additions to them are out-of-the-way. In other cases, indeed, it is only the verbal expression which prevents the images from appearing commonplace—e.g. the image of the cankerworm in the bud of the rose:

And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud. (Sonnet 35, line 4)

Here it is the powerfully emotional adjectives forming the antithesis that save the image from mere obvious ordinariness. A similar effect is obtained in Sonnet 12, line 2:

And see the brave day sunk in hideous night.

and also (without, however, the antithesis) in Sonnet 116, lines 9–10, where the words *bending* and *compass* again make true poetry out of a very ordinary image. Again, the comparison of the passage of youth to old age and death with the passage of the day from morning to night is ordinary enough, but with one word Shakespeare takes away all ordinariness:

... when his youthful morn
Hath travail'd on to age's *steepy* night.

(Sonnet 63, lines 4–5)

Or, again, the idea that an infected flower is not so impressive as a whole-some weed needs no great strength of imagination to call it up as an image of the moral corruption of an outstanding person; but Shakespeare's magnificent diction in Sonnet 94, lines 11 and 12, carries off the image with great *éclat*:

But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity.

Apart from the power of the words *outraves* and *dignity* these lines owe something to the subtle interrelation between *base* in line 11 (meaning 'really "low"') and *basest* in line 12 (meaning 'generally considered to be "low"').

This is not to say that the images of the *Sonnets* are not often extremely fine, but that they are often not particularly remarkable in themselves. Indeed, even when the images do not rely wholly on the diction to provide the real excellence of the lines, they are often enhanced by it. Moreover, there are plenty of images, and they have many sources, and this gives the *Sonnets* as a corpus of poetry great richness and range. Again, even where the individual images are not out-of-the-way themselves, they are often (we have given some instances) remarkable in combination. The fertility and combinatory power of Shakespeare's mind often more than compensate for the shortness of the original spark-gap between the image and that which it images. The fertility, however, sometimes results, as we have seen, in effects which it is difficult, for modern readers at least, to appreciate at all fully without careful scrutiny; and the dynamic quality of Shakespeare's mind sometimes results in a distortion of logic, which we should recognize, but accept as the occasional price of continuous poetic vitality. Shakespeare was a master of vital association and image, but not a consistent and logical applier of the 'conceit' as it was used either by the Elizabethans or by the Metaphysical poets.

VERBAL PROGRESSION

The succession of images in Sonnet 60 illustrates another feature, one that relates to something we have spoken of when discussing Shakespeare's use of language in the *Sonnets*. The transitions are, as we have shown, often suggested not by logical but by other associations, and a frequent influence here is that of the words themselves, both by their variant meanings and by their actual sounds. We have pointed out how this occurs as regards meanings with the backward-looking *crawls* in Sonnet 60, line 6, with *Nativity* and *main* (line 5) and with the different images for Time. The word/image progression works also by more overt play on the senses

of a word. Consider the three occurrences of the word *state* in Sonnet 29, with the differing overtones each carries. It works also by the way in which one word may suggest another by its *sound* (through alliteration, rhyme, assonance or even dissonance), or may produce a powerful effect by a shift of *grammatical function*.

To take the second of these first: In Sonnet 12, line 2, we 'see the *brave* day sunk in hideous night', and the adjective *brave* means 'resplendent', as in Sonnet 15, line 8. But in line 14 the word recurs, this time as a verb: 'breed to *brave* him when he takes thee hence'—regeneration through progeny with which to defy time. There was a melancholy, a tone of elegiac regret at youth's passing, in the first use: like the changes in *state* in no. 29 the word moves into a bold major key in the last line—a quality emphasized by its alliteration with *breed*. And this noun *breed* is another example of the associative contrasts the line holds: for it echoes, by contrary, the adjective *barren* of line 5.

The same sonnet gives us another interesting example of sound-relation:

And summer's green all girded up in sheaves
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard.

(Sonnet 12, lines 7-8)

Bier—beard; the vowels, even if they were possibly not quite identical sounds in Shakespeare's day, are close enough to attract attention: and their value is not merely phonal. *Summer's green*, by the time it is 'girded up in sheaves', is no longer green; it is a faded yellow, almost white: and the *beard* of corn belongs to the mature plant, not to the young blade, just as the whiteness (and indeed the bristliness) of a beard is that of age (cf. line 4): and the harvest cart is the *bier* of one year's vegetation. The sound-echo seems to suggest as well as to enforce the image.

In speaking of sound, however, we must be very careful. We must remember that Shakespeare's contemporaries did not speak English with the sounds of twentieth century 'Received Pronunciation': and it is only too possible to indulge in rhapsodical expositions of 'the music of Shakespeare's lines' that a little historical knowledge quickly shows to be pious nonsense. What is relevant is the interrelation of sounds—the

repetitions or the contrasts of vowels and consonants, the sequences or changes of open or closed vowels, of labials, dentals or gutturals, not the actual noises made. A sonnet like no. 29, where the tone-quality of the first nine lines (the first line of the sestet summing the mood of the octave) is vigorously contrasted with that of the remaining five: or no. 71, where the whole tone of the first quatrain is sharply contrasted, vocally as well as in speed, with the second, and where lines 9 and 10 echo the sound effect of lines 1-4 by way of recapitulation, will adequately repay analysis as long as the caveat about changes in English pronunciation is not forgotten. Or look into Sonnet 30 and see how in lines 1, 3-4, 6-8 and 9-10 Shakespeare employs consonant and vowel qualities to give the pace and mood of a line. The reader will readily find other examples of direct relation between the sound effects, the rhythms and the patterned structure and movement of the *Sonnets*.

Part 3

Editions and 'Problems' of the Sonnets

EDITIONS

No autograph manuscript of any of Shakespeare's sonnets has been discovered, and none of the extant seventeenth-century manuscript copies of individual sonnets has any independent textual authority.

Two of the sonnets (nos. 138 and 144) were printed in a miscellany of poems called *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599, but the first full edition of the 154 sonnets was published in 1609 by Thomas Thorpe. This is generally known as 'The Quarto', and is the basis of all subsequent texts. There is no external evidence as to whether Shakespeare sanctioned the publication. Scholars and critics have differed widely in their estimates of the merits of the Quarto text. There are a certain number of obvious misprints, and in other cases the wording has puzzled readers and excited doubt as to the reliability of the text. As regards punctuation, this does not seem to follow any consistent pattern, and, in any case, often interferes with the understanding and enjoyment of the poems by modern readers not thoroughly accustomed to the different methods and frequent vagaries of Elizabethan punctuation. It is, moreover, in any case hard to believe that Shakespeare can have corrected the proofs of the *Sonnets*.

Over thirty years later, in 1640, John Benson (who had printed the Second Folio of Shakespeare's Works in 1632) brought out a piratical publication called *Poems: Written by Wil. Shakespeare, Gent.* This printed 146 of the *Sonnets*, jumbling their order, sometimes changing the masculine pronouns or adjectives into their feminine counterparts, and interlarding the *Sonnets* with other poems, including some by other poets, e.g. Ben Jonson and Milton. Although this publication corrected a few of the Quarto's obvious misprints, it made far more mistakes of its own, and is generally unreliable. Yet it was followed by all the subsequent editions for over a hundred years, except for the republication of the 1609 text by Bernard Lintot in 1711.

The tradition of the 1609 Quarto text was established by the leading Shakespearean scholars, George Steevens, Edward Capell and Edmond

Malone in the late eighteenth century, and has rightly been continued to the present day. Every modern edition concerned to print a text as close as possible to the poems as Shakespeare probably wrote them must take the Quarto as the basis, while giving due consideration to the most brilliant and scholarly of the emendations which have been suggested to deal with the cases where the Quarto text is apparently faulty.

THE DATE OF THE SONNETS

It is almost certain that the *Sonnets* were written many years before Thorpe printed them in 1609. Scholars have differed widely as to when they were written. Professor Hotson, for instance, suggests a date as early as 1587-9, when Shakespeare was between 23 and 25. (Readers interested to know Professor Hotson's full argument should consult his *Shakespeare's Sonnets Dated*, Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1950, and his *Mr W.H.*, Hart-Davis, 1964.) Scholars' views as to the date of composition are most often closely tied to their identification of the friend with whom so many of the first 126 sonnets are concerned. Professor Hotson, for example, bases much of his argument on his identification of the friend as William Hatchcliffe, a student of Gray's Inn, who acted the part of the Prince True-Love in the Christmas Saturnalia or revels at Gray's Inn in 1587-8. Other scholars favouring an early date (i.e. before 1593) have most often identified the friend as Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton (1573-1624); while those who favour a later date (1595 onwards) usually identify him as William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke (1580-1630). One important factor in identification has been the wording of the Dedication that Thomas Thorpe prefixed to the 1609 Quarto, which addresses a certain 'Mr W. H.' as 'the onlie begetter of these insuing sonnets'. Other evidence which scholars have taken into account in attempting to determine the date of composition has included apparent allusions in particular sonnets to contemporary events, and the style of various sonnets in comparison with that of Shakespeare's plays in different phases of his development as a dramatist.

Southampton, Pembroke and Hatcliffe are the three chief candidates so far proposed for identification as the FRIEND, though the name William Hughes (or Hewes) has also been suggested, and the person corresponding to it variously and often rather imaginatively identified. All these identifications are connected with the initials 'W.H.' in the Dedication (see plate below), though in Southampton's case, if 'W.H.' really referred to him, it would be with the initials reversed. Some writers dispute the evidence

TO. THE. ONLIE. BEGETTER. OF.
THESE. INSVING. SONNETS.
MR. W. H. ALL. HAPPINESSE.
AND. THAT. ETERNITIE.
PROMISED.
BY.
OVR. EVER-LIVING. POET.
WISHETH.
THE. WELL-WISHING.
ADVENTVRER. IN.
SETTING.
FORTH.

T. T.

of the Dedication, maintaining that *begetter* means not 'inspirer' but 'procurer'—i.e. of the manuscript for the publisher. This would open the field wide for people whatever their initials, as candidates for identification as the friend. Linguistic evidence favours the meaning 'inspirer', and makes it very improbable that the use of the word *begetter* in the Dedication would have suggested to any contemporary reader the sense 'procurer'. It would seem, therefore, that the initials 'W.H.' have some relevance to the identity of the friend. No theory of identity so far advanced, however, carries full conviction, and the controversy must be regarded as still unsettled.

The DARK LADY was by the first identity-seekers considered to be a conventional literary figure, and this has often been argued for, though not very convincingly. She has also, however, been variously identified as *Anne Hathaway*, Shakespeare's wife: as *Lady Rich* (Sidney's 'Stella'): as *Mary Fitton*, who was by 1595 one of the Queen's Maids of Honour, who became Herbert's mistress and who bore him a son in 1601: as *Jane Davenant* (mother of the poet Sir John Davenant, who was fond of hinting that Shakespeare was his father): as *Lucy Negro*, a notorious negro courtesan, and as *Lucy Morgan*, another lady of the same profession. No really convincing arguments have been advanced in support of any of these candidates.

The same can also be said of attempts to identify the RIVAL POET. In both cases selection has often depended on a previous identification of the friend. The poets proposed have been Daniel, Drayton, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Chapman, Spenser, and such very minor poets as Barnabe Barnes and Gervase Markham.

Earlier Sonnets and Poetic Traditions and their Relation to Shakespeare's Sonnets

When Shakespeare started writing his sonnets the form had already been used by literally *thousands* of sonneteers in Western Europe. Several hundred thousands of sonnets had been actually printed, and, no doubt, a great number were written but never published. The writing of sonnets had started at least three-and-a-half centuries before. The earliest known sonnets are those written by poets at the brilliant Sicilian court of Frederick II in the early thirteenth century. It is probable that the earliest of these poems was written by Jacopo da Lentino, who was King Frederick's imperial notary. It is virtually certain that the general form of the sonnet—an octave and a sestet—resulted from combining two already existing forms—a Sicilian eight-line stanza called a *strambotto*, and a six-line stanza which may have derived from Arabic poetry. The sonnet passed from Sicily to the mainland of Italy, and there it was cultivated fairly continuously until Shakespeare's time and beyond. From Italy the sonnet spread to some other European countries—first to Spain (early in the fifteenth century), then to England (in the 1520s), and soon after (direct from Italy) to France (possibly in the late 1530s).

Among the earliest Italian poets to cultivate the sonnet were Dante (1265–1321), in the *Vita Nuova*; and Petrarch (1307–74) in his *Canzoniere* or *Rime*, which mark the summit of sonnet-writing in Italy. The sonnets of Petrarch had an enormous success in Europe over the centuries. They were first circulated in manuscript, and were only printed a hundred years after Petrarch's death. It is interesting to note that thirty-four editions were published in Italy in the fifteenth century and 167 in the sixteenth century. Several editions were published in France in the sixteenth century. In England the *Rime* were not published until much later, though a number of the sixteenth-century English poets were, in varying degrees, acquainted with the poems. Besides being widely read and admired, Petrarch's sonnets also came to be considered (in an age when imitation was the fashion) as a storehouse of models for would-be imitators. It

would, indeed, be very hard to exaggerate the influence which Petrarch's *Rime* had upon subsequent sonneteers either in Italy or Spain or England or France.

Those poets or poetasters who were influenced, however, took very different things from the *Rime*. There is, indeed, one particularly important rift in both continental and English sonneteering. This is the rift between work which consists of sonnet sequences which at least *appear* to represent the phases of some personal relationship between the poet and another person; and work which consists either of isolated sonnets or else of series of sonnets which do not even *appear* to represent the phases of a personal relationship, but only, at most, certain points in such a relationship. The first sequence of Petrarch's sonnets (*In vita di Madonna Laura*) which includes 227 sonnets (interspersed with poems in other forms), does appear to represent phases in a relationship involving some changes of mood. An imitator whose writing did not spring from personal experiences could easily, however, use it as a model for monotonous repetition of theme, thought and feeling. This is what happened in most of the minor Elizabethan sonnet sequences, such as Thomas Lodge's *Phillis*, Giles Fletcher's *Licia*, Bernard Griffin's *Fidessa* and even Henry Constable's *Diana*. Despite certain characteristic qualities of diction, imagery and movement, these 'sequences' (which are almost all third-rate or worse) are, in respect of theme, thought and feeling, pretty monotonous. The individual sonnets in such sequences, however, like many of the isolated sonnets contributed to the many anthologies published in Europe in this period, particularly in sixteenth-century Italy, or produced by *virtuosi* to be sung by them to accompaniment on a stringed instrument, often aimed at producing surprise and delight by their ingenious conceits or epigrams. One of the chief masters of this game was Serafino d'Aquila (1466-1500), who had immense influence on continental poets, and, partly through the French poet Philippe Desportes (1546-1606), also on English work. Typical is Serafino's comparison of his mistress to the Hydra: just as the Hydra had seven heads, so his mistress had seven ways of conquering men and gods—complexion, forehead, hand, speech, eyes, bosom, hair; but the ancient Hydra was overcome by fire, whereas the

modern Hydra was *nourished* by the fire of her lovers. Serafino, perhaps wisely, refused to publish his poems, but they were published after his death, and had a great vogue during the early sixteenth century. Serafino, though he staked everything on the single poem, and was, moreover, a licentious poet (which Petrarch was *not*), was nevertheless a Petrarchist in some sense. His exaggeration is imitative of Petrarch's high-flown sentiments, though unlike them in being scarcely sincere, and also promiscuous in their objects. Moreover, such poets as Serafino were not un-Petrarchan in using conceits. But they *were* un-Petrarchan in their dominant desire to evoke surprise and admiration for their ingenuity. Their work does not seem to express any depth or urgency of personal experience—in contrast to Petrarch's own, which seems to express it to the point of obsession, and even beyond.

This matter of the relation between ingenuity, on the one hand, and apparent depth and urgency of personal experience, on the other, is particularly important in considering cultivated European poetry of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The element of ingenuity is by no means to be thought of as incompatible with sincerity, though, on the other hand, however ingenious a poem might be, e.g. Donne's poem *The Flea*, it could never rank as high as a poem showing a similar degree of ingenuity but also evincing considerable depth and pressure of personal experience, such as, to take other poems of Donne, *The Relic* and *A Valediction: forbidding mourning*.

Shakespeare's *Sonnets* give a strong impression of deriving from personal experiences in the course of a relationship with a man, and with a woman. In this respect they belong to the same class as Petrarch's *Rime* and also such collections as the various *Amours* of Ronsard, Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and Spenser's *Amoretti*. On the other hand, there are plenty of conceits in them, and in some poems the conceits dominate completely, the poems being simply *tours de force* of ingenuity. In point of fact the *Sonnets* vary in this respect through an extremely wide range—a few of them achieving their effect almost entirely through their powerful sincerity (e.g. Sonnet 72), while in others a very rich invention of imagery combines with strong feeling to produce such superb poems as nos. 73

and 116. In a sense the *Sonnets* of Shakespeare are more in the Petrarchan tradition than those of many of the poets who would usually be considered Petrarchans. They appear to represent the course of two relationships. Moreover, like Petrarch's work, they appear to spring often from strong personal feeling, and, as with the *Rime*, a reader's sense of this grows in the course of reading the sequence. Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, however, differ from Petrarch's in several ways. First, of course, the situation they represent is quite different from that represented in the *Rime*. Petrarch's first sequence represents a period of twenty-one years of the frustrated love of a cleric for a married woman who only occasionally shows any return of feeling. His second sequence represents his reactions and readjustments to life after the death of Laura, and the relations between his love for her and his religion. The world of Shakespeare's two sequences is entirely different. Both his sequences seem to represent a far shorter period than that covered by Petrarch's first sequence; and the relationship with the Friend, besides being a relationship between two men (the only parallel among sonnet sequences of any distinction being Michelangelo's sonnets) was evidently both one in which the poet's love was strongly reciprocated and one involving more phases in its shorter duration. The shifts of feeling expressed are more numerous and more complex than in Petrarch. The 126 sonnets of Shakespeare's first series are more densely packed with varied experiences than the 227 sonnets of Petrarch's first series. On the other hand, in both Shakespeare's series the element of religion is missing.

A second great difference between Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and Petrarch's derives from the fact that, whereas Petrarch's came near the start of sonnet writing, Shakespeare's were written at the close of the great period of sonnet writing. They are, as one might therefore expect, far more complex in literary texture. Had Shakespeare been a mere imitator this might well not have been so, but he was, of course, a great original poet. Unlike the simple imitations written by many of the continental and English sonneteers, and unlike even the freer adaptations, no sonnet of Shakespeare's seems to bear any close resemblance to any of Petrarch's. Indeed, only the last two, rather trifling, sonnets, 153 and 154, have been traced to any

precise models. Shakespeare, on the other hand, did nevertheless inherit something of various traditions which were current when he was writing.

One such tradition was that stemming from classical Latin poetry, particularly from Horace, in which we find a sense of the common situation of humanity in face of the threats levelled at it by time and death. This was the tradition of

cheu fugaces, Postume, Postume,
labuntur anni

(Horace, *Odes*, II, xiv)

of the knowledge of the coming of wrinkles and hurrying old age and inexorable Death. But it was also the tradition of

exegi monumentum aere perennius

(Horace, *Odes*, III, xxx)

represented notably in sixteenth-century poetry in the work of Ronsard and Du Bellay. These strains are strong in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

An entirely different kind of tradition, which evidently came in some way to influence Shakespeare, was the burlesque tradition, originating in Italy, usually concerned to criticize one thing or another—for instance, false dignity, luxurious living, exaggerated compliment. One of its chief exponents was Francesco Berni (1497–1535), with one of whose sonnets Shakespeare's no. 130 (*My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun*) has much in common. This tradition had fair game in the fulsome compliments of the shallower Petrarchans.

Yet another tradition was the pastoral tradition. This came down from Theocritus and Virgil, through Bion and Moschus, and Sannazaro, and the *Diana* of the Spanish writer Montemayor, which was such a strong influence on Sidney. There are occasional touches of this kind of writing in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, for example in Sonnets 98, 99 and 102.

Then there was the tradition of Platonism, which may well have impinged on Shakespeare in the simplified and attenuated form in which we find it in Hoby's translation (1551) of Castiglione's *Cortegiano* and in Spenser's *Four Hymnes* (1596). This form of Platonism perhaps mainly

appears in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in references to the Theory of Ideas—of ideal archetypes on which objects in this world were supposed to be patterned—in particular the idea of Beauty, of whose ideal character objects in the world were held to partake in varying degrees. It is worth noting, however, that in various places in the *Sonnets* Shakespeare actually makes the Friend himself the archetype of which other beautiful objects are only shadows, e.g. in no. 19 the Friend is 'Beauty's pattern to succeeding men'; and again in Sonnet 53 we have the poet asking the friend:

What is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
Since every one hath, every one, one shade,
And you, but one, can every shadow lend:
Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you.

Another good example is Sonnet 98, lines 9–12.

A very different literary tradition affecting Shakespeare's *Sonnets* was the Ovidian tradition. This had intermingled with the Petrarchan tradition, and, indeed, considerable licentiousness of the kind one finds in Ovid's *Amores* is to be found in some of the Italian Petrarchists. Shakespeare was compared to Ovid by at least one of his contemporaries, and there is plenty of evidence that he knew some of Ovid's work, and drew on it. It is, however, hard to pin down particular direct borrowings in the *Sonnets*, though the spirit both of licentious and of serious sonnets is sometimes similar to that of Ovid's work. In any case, though, Shakespeare did not take everything Ovidian in his work direct from Ovid. He took some of it through Marlowe, and it may even be that the procreation Sonnets (nos. 1–17) owe something to that very Ovidian poem, Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (especially to Book I, lines 317 ff.).

Among the other literary forces which have left their mark on the *Sonnets* were the Bible and the Prayer Book. The Bible versions concerned were probably principally the Geneva Bible (1560) and the Bishops' Bible (1568), not, of course, the Authorized Version, which was not published until 1611. The Prayer Book was that of 1552. There are a

number of instances of their direct impact on the *Sonnets*, perhaps the most striking being the bold use of *Exodus*, ii, 14 in Sonnet 121, line 9:

No: I am that I am, and they that level
At my abuses reckon up their own.

This instance seems almost like a Shakespearean attempt to emulate the brilliantly audacious use by Marlowe in *Dr Faustus* of the Johannine *Consummatum est* to mark Faustus's signing of the pact with the devil.

But it is time to call a halt to this tour of the influences which intermingled with the main Petrarchan tradition and helped to make the *Sonnets* of Shakespeare, coming at the end of the great period of sonneteering, so much richer in literary texture than the work of Petrarch himself.

We must now take a brief look at sonneteering in England in the sixteenth century. As we have been told by scores of literary histories, it was, indeed, Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) who introduced the sonnet into England from Italy. He had travelled in Italy and become a devotee of Italian poetry. It is hard to say precisely what Italian poets he had read. The sonneteers most in fashion there at that time were poets of conceit like Serafino; but it is quite certain that however well Wyatt may have known their work he did not succumb to the influence of such second-class poets, but was most powerfully impressed by the deeper and more personal work of Petrarch himself. Wyatt picked out a few of Petrarch's sonnets and imitated them in detail, and almost all the rest of his sonnets also bear some relation to particular sonnets of the master. Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1515-47), a poetic disciple of Wyatt, also wrote a number of sonnets, again imitating Petrarch in some cases. Neither poet, however, slavishly copied his models. Their 'imitations' are generally intelligent, and sometimes brilliant, adaptations of Petrarch's poems to their own pervasive modes of experience.

Surrey made an important technical innovation. Italian sonnets had only used four or five rhymes in the fourteen lines, the octave normally rhyming *abba abba*, and the sestet generally following one of three rhyme-schemes: *cde cde*, *cd cd cd*, or *cdedec*. Wyatt had followed this general scheme, though he usually ended with a couplet, e.g. *cd d cee*, a pattern

unusual in Italian sonnets though not unknown. Surrey introduced a form with seven rhymes, using alternate rhymes in three quatrains and ending with a couplet (*abab cdcd efef gg*). It may well be that this form was better adapted to the English language, which was poorer in rhymes than the Italian. Structurally, moreover, it allowed more flexibility. A poet could either retain the usual structure of octave and sestet, or he could conceive of the poem as three quatrains followed by a clinching couplet. It was this new form introduced by Surrey that Shakespeare was to use to such magnificent effect.

The sonnets of Wyatt and Surrey appeared with their other lyrical verse in an anthology published by Richard Tottel in 1557, and known as *Totte's Miscellany*. Curiously enough, there was no immediate vogue for sonneteering in England. It is hard to explain this with any confidence.

In the years 1580-1600, however, the huge weight of continental poetry, in a great variety of forms, including the sonnet, made an immense impact on English writers, some of whom simply translated or slightly adapted foreign models, and others of whom, like Sir Philip Sidney (1554-86), though more original in their work, adopted continental poetic forms and conventions, and derived much of the spirit of their writing from deep and often extensive acquaintance with continental work both ancient and modern.

Even so, it was not until after the actual publication in 1590 and 1591 of Sidney's own sonnets in his *Arcadia*, and, more especially, in his *Astrophil and Stella*, that a full flood of sonneteering swept English poetry. The decade 1590-1600 saw the publication of twenty-five or more collections or sequences of sonnets, mostly love sonnets addressed to real or imaginary ladies. These varied immensely in quality, the best being the work of Samuel Daniel (1562-1619), Michael Drayton (1563-1631), and Edmund Spenser (1552-99). Few of the sonnets by any of the other poets carry conviction. They were, indeed, mostly either slavish imitations of continental sonnets or more or less feeble elaborations of conceits to be found in continental poets or in Sidney, or of mediocre fancies coined in the particular poet's own inferior mint. They often amply deserved Sir John Davies's charge (in a sonnet written c. 1596) of being 'bastard

sonnets' which 'base rhymers daily begot to their own shames and poetry's disgrace'.

Sidney's own sonnets (written 1580-3) had been far superior. Like Wyatt he treated personal relationships and love-situations, and like Wyatt he admired Petrarch; but, like Petrarch, he explored his love-relationship and love-situations far more extensively than Wyatt had done. Moreover, many of his poems have a dramatic immediacy lacking in the general run of Elizabethan sonnets. They deal, however, rather with feelings and thoughts than with sense-impressions, and so do not attain the rounded richness we find in the best sonnets of Shakespeare. In his use of the sonnet form Sidney shows himself an indefatigable experimenter, using no less than thirty-three different varieties of sonnet structure. Interestingly enough, his trend was from the Surrey form to a modified Italian form with an Italian octave *abba abba*, and a sestet with a concluding couplet *cd cd ee*. The logical pattern of Sidney's sonnets is generally dynamic, moving forward towards a conclusion, rather than merely elaborating a thought or conceit; while, in large-scale terms, the whole series of sonnets in *Astrophil and Stella* moves meaningfully from point to point in the course of a frustrated love-relationship.

Apart from Sidney it is only in Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595) and Shakespeare's *Sonnets* that we find Elizabethan sequences that give the impression of being a series of poems representing a number of situations and experiences in the course of a close relationship lasting over a substantial period. A single sonnet is, indeed, in itself, in Leigh Hunt's phrase, 'a moment's monument'; but it is rare that a relationship sufficiently sustained and eventful to provide a long series of deep or intense moments has found an artist who could express them convincingly. It is Sidney, and, above all, Shakespeare, among English sonneteers, who have been outstandingly successful in this way.

Although they were not published until 1609 it seems likely that Shakespeare's *Sonnets* were (with one or two possible exceptions) written between 1590 and 1600, that is, during the heyday of Elizabethan sonneteering. (For the problem of dating see pp. 184 ff., above.) In view of the prevalent habit of circulating poems in manuscript it is very hard to

determine priorities where there are occasional verbal resemblances between a sonnet by Shakespeare and one by a contemporary. What seems clear is that Shakespeare, like Sidney, though influenced by the general habits and conventions of sonnet-writing, shows, on present evidence, little detailed indebtedness to individual sources, English or foreign; though further research may always bring something to light.

In respect of form, Shakespeare, unlike Sidney, was no innovator in his sonnet-writing. He uses, almost without exception, and like most of the Elizabethan sonneteers, the Surrey rhyme-scheme, *abab cdcd efef gg*, though he does exploit this general framework in a number of different ways, sometimes, for instance, making the logical structure consist of three quatrains and a couplet, sometimes making a definite sense-pause at the end of the octave, and sometimes, though more rarely, making some other division. Shakespeare's adherence to the one general framework may well have helped him to achieve the extraordinary, and apparently easy, mastery which we find in the best of the *Sonnets*.

Appendixes

Appendix I — Suggestions for Further Reading

Much of the copious literature around and about Shakespeare's *Sonnets* is either very specialized academic theorizing and speculation about the 'Problems' (of dating the poems and identifying the persons they refer to) or very flimsy and uncritical. The following, however, which ought to be available in any school or college library, may help towards a critical appreciation of the *Sonnets* as poetry, and as seen against the linguistic and cultural background of Elizabethan England.

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Appendix II — A Key to Word-Play in the Sonnets

These are some of the words deliberately (and some of them frequently) played on in the 65 sonnets in this book. In the complete collection of 154 there are many others as well. The basis of the word-play is the ambiguity to be found in these words in Elizabethan usage. Without recognizing these varying senses, and the way in which the presence of two or even more senses of a word (or sound) in the one line enriches the verbal and emotional pattern, it is not possible fully to appreciate the texture of the poems concerned. Some of the senses are now obsolete; some poems of lighter and even trivial quality (and there are such among the complete *Sonnets*) abuse this device; but some of the greatest also depend on it for their full impact. A mistake of many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century annotators was to prescribe a single sense, only, for each line.

antic; antique: spelt in the 1609 edition, without discrimination, *antique*; meaning (1) 'grotesque', and hence in Sonnet 19, line 10 'caricaturing'—but also (2) 'immemorial', and possibly also, as an overtone, in the same line, 'drawing pictures of old age'.

arrest: primarily 'an act of stopping'; but our modern 'seizure by an officer' can also be present—see Sonnet 74, line 1.

art: conveys first the idea 'technical or specialized skill or learning', but may also imply 'trickery' or 'cunning'. The word is frequent.

assail: (1) 'to attack by force', and hence (2) 'to tempt' or 'to attempt to seduce'. Sonnet 70, line 10.

base: primarily 'dark', 'gloomy'; but carrying also the implication of 'low' or 'inferior'. Sonnet 33, line 5 (*basest*).

dear: This word in English is a coalescence of two Anglo-Saxon words—*déor*, which meant 'severe, grievous', and *déore*, which meant 'glorious, noble' and hence both 'costly' and 'held in high esteem'. It thus has a wide variety of possibilities for word-play, as in Sonnet 30, line 4 (see note). Instances of the word are frequent, and the alert reader will readily recognize the ways it is played on.

fair: (1) 'light-haired and light-complexioned'; (2) 'handsome' or 'beautiful'; (3) 'honest and faithful'. Frequent, but especially in Sonnets from 127 on.

figure: (1) 'numerical symbol'; (2) 'shape', 'appearance', or 'face'. Sonnet 104, line 10 (see note).

fool: (1) a servile attendant, one mocked with impunity; (2) a foolish creature. Sonnet 124, line 13, (see note).

husbandry: may involve an evident play on the marital relation and on tillage for crops as well as the idea of good estate management. Sonnet 13, line 10.

lovely: (1) 'beautiful'; (2) 'lovable'. A frequent word in the *Sonnets*.

proud: The word frequently plays on some of the senses (1) 'self-esteeming'; (2) 'causing or displaying self-esteem' (as one of the senses in Sonnet 2, line 3); (3) 'gorgeous'; (4) 'high-mettled, lascivious and sensually excitable'; (5) 'selfish, cold or unkind'.

rare and *rarity*: It is doubtful whether in the *Sonnets* the word ever simply means 'uncommon'. The stress is rather on the excellence that makes things precious.

sad(ly): in most cases means 'sober(ly)', 'solemn(ly)', 'dull(y)' or 'drear(il)y', rather than 'sorrowful(ly)', and the latter sense if present is only a secondary meaning.

son; *sun*: There is just possibly a phonal play in Sonnet 33, line 14.

state: (1) 'condition' (a neutral sense); (2) 'rank'; (3) 'splendid estate'. The several senses are played on a number of times, markedly in Sonnet 29.

steal: used consciously in two or three of the mingled senses of gradualness, secretiveness and theft. Sonnet 33, line 8; Sonnet 63, line 8; Sonnet 92, line 1; Sonnet 104, line 10.

suit (vb.): (1) 'dress'; (2) 'match'. Sonnet 127, line 10 (*suited*).

travail and *travel*: These, originally the same word, were often indiscriminately spelt *travail(e)* or *travaill* or *travel* until long after Shakespeare's time. The modern distinction of spelling is frequently bound to obscure one element in the doublet of senses, as in Sonnet 27, line 2.

true (*truly* and *truth*): The several senses of (1) loyalty and faith, (2) truth speaking, (3) rightness or proper proportion, (4) reality, (5) correctness, accuracy, (6) reliability or security, are variously and frequently played on.

use(r) (n. and vb.): (1) employment; (2) (legal) right of use. In Sonnet 134, line 10 the word is thus played on in connection with *usurer* in the same line.

There are in addition frequent plays on other words which, being so utilized only once in the *Sonnets*, are not listed here but discussed in the relevant notes.

Appendix III — Glossary

This lists only those uses that might cause difficulty to a modern reader. A few words occurring in isolated cases needing discussion (e.g. *rondure*, Sonnet 21, line 8) are treated fully in the notes and therefore not included here.

abuse (n.): (1) misuse; (2) ill-usage; (3) lapse of conduct (sometimes milder than the sense today); (4) possibly also 'deceit'. Sonnet 121, line 10 (sense 3); Sonnet 134, line 12 (sense 1, 2 or 4, see note). Never used by Shakespeare in the modern sense of 'verbal insult'.

admire: wonder at (with or without, but usually with, delight). Sonnet 123, line 5.

adulterate (adj.): corrupted. Sonnet 121, line 5.

advised: carefully considered. Sonnet 49, line 4.

afford: offer. Sonnet 85, line 7.

against (exceptional senses): (1) in preparation for, Sonnet 49, lines 1, 5 and 9; (2) in front of, Sonnet 49, line 11; (3) exposed to, Sonnet 73, line 3.

aggravate: increase, enlarge (the only meaning in Shakespeare, with extension to 'exaggerate'). Sonnet 146, line 10.

alone: only (except in a few cases, e.g. Sonnet 29, line 2). Usually placed after the words it qualifies, and hence apt to mislead a modern reader.

antic, antique: (1) grotesque, caricaturish, quaint; (2) ancient. Spelt at that time indiscriminately, but usually 'antique', the word was thus easy to play on. Sonnet 19, line 10.

approve: know by experience, or prove true by trial. Sonnet 70, line 5; Sonnet 147, line 7.

arrest (n.): (1) check, stay, act of stopping; (2) seizure by an officer. Sonnet 74, line 1.

art: (1) technical skill, specialized learning; (2) trickery, cunning. (Frequent.)

assail: tempt, attempt to seduce (derivative from the military 'assault').

Sonnet 70, line 10.

astonish: stun (into silence). Sonnet 86, line 8.

base: dark, gloomy (not without a consciousness of the sense 'low, inferior'). Sonnet 33, line 5.

bear [it] out: endure, last out. Sonnet 116, line 12.

becoming (pres. part.): supplying grace to. Sonnet 127, line 13.

bevel (adj.): out of true. Sonnet 121, line 11.

blazon (n.): full description in rich terms. Sonnet 106, line 5 (see note).

brave (adj.): showy, resplendent. Sonnet 12, line 2; Sonnet 15, line 8.

brave (vb.): defy. Sonnet 12, line 14 (see note).

bravery: splendour. Sonnet 34, line 4.

breed: offspring. Sonnet 12, line 14.

canker (n.): (1) the wild rose or dog-rose (*rosa canina*). Sonnet 54, line 5;
(2) larva of bud-eating caterpillar. Sonnet 70, line 7; Sonnet 99,
line 13.

captain (adj.): chief, principal, commanding. Sonnet 52, line 8; Sonnet 66,
line 12 (see note).

carcanet: necklace or ornamental collar. Sonnet 52, line 8.

character (vb. or n.): write, writing. Sonnet 59, line 8; Sonnet 85, line 3;
Sonnet 108, line 1.

charge (n.): (1) cost, expense—but perhaps also (2) thing or responsibility
entrusted. Sonnet 146, line 8 (see note).

charter: privilege, licence, right of free action. Sonnet 87, line 3.

check (vb.): (see note on Sonnet 15, line 6).

churl: miser. Sonnet 1, line 12 (see note): but in Sonnet 69, line 11 it
carries the meaning 'rude, low-bred fellow' current today in the
adjective 'churlish'.

comfort: then sometimes used in the etymological sense (now lost) of
'support or strengthening', as in the Authorized Version, and this is
possibly the sense in Sonnet 134, line 4.

comment (n.): expository treatise. Sonnet 85, line 2.

- comment* (vb.): see note on Sonnet 15, line 4.
- compare* (n.): comparison or analogy. Sonnet 21, line 5; Sonnet 130, line 14.
- composed*: perfectly composed, impeccably proportioned. Sonnet 59, line 10 (the sense deriving from 'composition' = 'balanced constitution, coherence and consistency').
- conceit*: concept, realization, thought, apprehension, idea. Sonnet 15, line 9; Sonnet 108, line 13.
- confined*: having a fixed and limited or settled date or term. Sonnet 107, line 4 (see note).
- confound*: destroy, ruin (a strong term in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). Sonnet 5, line 6; Sonnet 60, line 8; Sonnet 64, line 10; Sonnet 69, line 7.
- conquest*: real estate acquired otherwise than by inheritance—opposed to 'heritage'. A Scottish law term. Sonnet 74, line 11 (see note).
- consent*: a making of common cause, a being of one mind (cf. Latin *consentio*). Sonnet 28, line 6.
- contracted*: betrothed, bound by exclusive contract. Sonnet 1, line 2 (see note).
- control* (vb.): (legal), to set a term to, limit the period of. Sonnet 107, line 3.
- convert*: turn—in a simple, non-specialized sense now lost. Sonnet 11, line 4; Sonnet 49, line 7.
- correct* (vb.): see note on Sonnet 111, line 12.
- correction*: punishment. Sonnet 111, line 12.
- cost*: (1) ornament, display; (2) expense, outlay. Sonnet 64, line 2 (both senses); Sonnet 146, line 5 (sense 2).
- count* (n.): account, audit. Sonnet 2, line 11.
- counterfeit*: portrait. Sonnet 53, line 3.
- complement*: conjunction (of ideas). Sonnet 21, line 5.
- crooked*: malignant. Sonnet 60, line 7.
- damasked*: see note on Sonnet 130, line 5.
- date*: appointed final time, *terminus ad quem* (hence deriving *dateless* in Sonnet 30, line 6). Sonnet 18, line 4; Sonnet 123, line 5.

dear: This in fact represents two different Anglo-Saxon words that came, before the sixteenth century, to be spelt and pronounced identically. The one meant 'severe' or 'grievous', the other 'glorious, noble' and hence both 'costly' and 'held in high esteem'. When the two had coalesced, the resulting 'dear' offered rich opportunity for ambiguity, which Shakespeare often exploits. (See note on Sonnet 30, line 4.)

debate (n. and vb.): dispute, quarrel, strife, war (*not* the modern polite and regulated discussion). Sonnet 15, line 11 (see note).

depart: see note on Sonnet 11, line 2.

determinate (past part.): expired (or perhaps 'determinable'). Sonnet 87, line 4.

determination: date fixed for expiry. Sonnet 13, line 6.

dial: clock or watch. Sonnet 104, line 9.

disable: frustrate, prevent from using ability, incapacitate or pronounce . . . incapable. Sonnet 66, line 8.

disclose: unfold, unclothe (*not* 'show' or 'display' or 'reveal'). Sonnet 54, line 8.

disgrace (n. and vb.): the sense is more simply active than the modern 'ignominy'—it is the 'loss or deprivation of grace, beauty or reputation'. Frequent, e.g. Sonnet 33, line 8.

distil: as an intransitive verb this meant 'fall drop by drop' as in *Deuteronomy*, xxxii, 2. (See note on Sonnet 54, line 14.)

doom: see note on Sonnet 107, line 4.

dress(ing): erect(ing), cf. French *dresser*. Sonnet 123, line 4.

eisel: vinegar (Latin *acetillum*, Old French *aisil*)—then believed to be a preventative, especially of plague. Sonnet 111, line 10.

enlarge: set at liberty. Sonnet 70, line 12.

ensconce: shelter behind a fortification. Sonnet 49, line 9.

expense: (1) loss; (2) squandering, wasteful spending (stronger than today). Sonnet 30, line 8 (sense 1); Sonnet 94, line 6; Sonnet 129, line 1 (sense 2).

fair (adj.): (1) light-haired and light-complexioned; (2) handsome or beautiful; (3) honest and faithful. The word is frequent and the different senses often played on, but especially in the 'Dark Woman' sonnets (nos. 127 ff.).

fair (n.): (1) beauty; (2) a thing of beauty. Sonnet 18, line 7 (playing on both senses); Sonnet 18, line 10 (sense 1); Sonnet 21, line 4 (sense 1); Sonnet 68, line 3 (sense 1).

fault: an act of transgression or offence (as in dialect today) rather than 'a defect'. Sonnet 138, line 14.

fester: rot. Sonnet 94, line 11.

figure: a likeness or imperfect copy (i.e. not the real thing). Sonnet 98, line 11.

filed: polished, refined (with a derogatory sense, as in the modern colloquial 'smooth'). Sonnet 85, line 4.

foiled: possibly = 'filed'—i.e. 'defiled': (see note on Sonnet 146, line 2).

foison: harvest plenty. Sonnet 53, line 9.

flourish: ornament or outward beauty. (See note on Sonnet 60, line 9.)

for: sometimes = against, to prevent (as in 'spraying roses *for* mildew'). Sonnet 52, line 4; Sonnet 63, line 9.

forlorn: abandoned—and hence gloomy or sad. Sonnet 33, line 7.

foul: ugly. Sonnet 127, line 6.

gaudy: joyously bedecked. (See note on Sonnet 1, line 10.)

glass: mirror. Sonnet 5, line 10.

go: walk (as distinct from, e.g. 'run'). Sonnet 130, line 11.

guard (vb.): ward off, parry. Sonnet 49, line 12.

gull (vb.): (1) deceive or dupe, but possibly (2) cram. (See note on Sonnet 86, line 10.)

habit: dress, attire. Sonnet 138, line 11.

hue: (1) colour; (2) external appearance, shape or form. Sonnet 98, line 6 (sense 1); Sonnet 104, line 11 (sense 2).

husbandry: careful economic management. Sonnet 13, line 10 (with a play on the implication of 'marriage').

imaginary: imaginative. Sonnet 27, line 9.

inhearse: lock up as in a tomb. (A hearse was a tomb, a cenotaph, or a monument hung with 'achievements': it only secondarily came down to meaning the wagon for the coffin.) Sonnet 86, line 3.

injurious: doing injustice, causing *injuria* as contrasted with mere harm (*damnum*)—not with the modern sense of *physical* harm. Sonnet 44, line 2; Sonnet 63, line 2.

injury: injustice done. Sonnet 40, line 12.

insult (vb.): exult and triumph over an enemy. (This sense seems to be the only meaning in Shakespeare.) Sonnet 107, line 12.

intelligence: information—as in 'Intelligence Corps' (or 'Service') today. Sonnet 86, line 10.

intend: take one's way. Cf. Latin *iter intendere*. Sonnet 27, line 6.

invention: art of finding matter to write (a term in Rhetoric). Sonnet 59, line 3.

jollity: fine array. Sonnet 66, line 3.

large: wide, extensive (the old sense: conveying a less general 'bigness' than it suggests today). Sonnet 44, line 10.

leese: lose. Sonnet 5, line 14.

level (n.): field of fire. Sonnet 117, line 11.

level (vb.): take aim at. Sonnet 121, line 9.

limits: regions (the Latin *finis*). Sonnet 44, line 4.

lovely: lovable (a less trivial and casual word than as now used). Sonnet 5, line 1; Sonnet 18, line 2; Sonnet 54, line 13; Sonnet 106, line 4.

lusty: full of animal spirits and joy, or of vitality. Sonnet 2, line 6; Sonnet 5, line 7.

main (n.): broad expanse (transferred from 'the main sea'). Sonnet 60, line 5. Cf. Sonnet 64, line 7 for the literal sense.

map: pattern or picture. The word was not necessarily then used only of a diagrammatic or projectional representation, but figuratively of a detailed representation in epitome. Sonnet 68, lines 1 and 13.

mark: target, point of aim. Sonnet 70, line 2: and hence 'sea mark' in Sonnet 116, line 5.

masonry: art or skill of masons (not the stonework itself). Sonnet 55, line 6.

memory: record, memorial, memento. Sonnet 1, line 4.

miscalled: slandered as. Sonnet 66, line 11.

misprision: misjudgment. Sonnet 87, line 11.

mistake (vb.): (1) misjudge; (2) involuntarily falsify. Sonnet 87, line 10.

nothing: a 'no-thing', worthlessness, a thing of no value. Sonnet 66, line 3.

nurse (vb.): feed, nourish. Sonnet 147, line 2.

only (adj.): either 'principal, chief', or 'peerless, pre-eminent'. Sonnet 1, line 10.

or . . . or: frequent for modern 'either . . . or'.

outbrave: make a finer show than (cf. *brave*). Sonnet 94, line 12.

owe: own, possess. Sonnet 18, line 10; Sonnet 70, line 14.

pie (in *proud-pied*): speckled or variegated with many colours. Sonnet 98, line 2.

policy: expedience. Sonnet 124, line 9.

politic: prudent, wise in disposing. Sonnet 124, line 11.

prescription: direction, orders, especially medical but not necessarily 'recipe' or 'medicine'. Sonnet 147, line 6. (Four out of six examples occurring in the plays are rather orders or directions than 'recipes'.)

proud: (1) gorgeous, resplendent, splendid in show; Sonnet 2, line 3; Sonnet 21, line 5; Sonnet 64, line 2; Sonnet 86, line 1; Sonnet 98, line 8; (2) selfish, cold or unkind; (3) lascivious. Sonnet 140, line 14 (playing on both senses 2 and 3).

prove: put to the test. Sonnet 117, line 13—hence the noun *proof*: test, trial, as in Sonnet 129, line 11.

quick: lively, live, vigorous, active. Sonnet 55, line 7.

rage: ravage (as in *Richard II*, II, iv, 14, 'to enjoy by rage and war'). Shakespeare never uses the word 'ravage' itself. Sonnet 13, line 12; Sonnet 64, line 5; Sonnet 65, line 3.

- rare*: excellent—and sometimes also ‘highly treasured’. Sonnet 56, line 14;
 Sonnet 130, line 13; and cf. Sonnet 21, line 7 and Sonnet 52, line 5.
- rarity*: a thing ‘rare’ in the above sense. Sonnet 60, line 11.
- reeks*: exhales, ascends as vapours (not requiring the modern repulsive association as in ‘stinks’). Sonnet 130, line 8.
- rehearse*: mention, set forth, tell of (*not* ‘practise’). Sonnet 21, line 4;
 Sonnet 71, line 11; Sonnet 81, line 11.
- remember*: several times used transitively by Shakespeare (= ‘remind’).
 Sonnet 120, line 9.
- remove, removed, remover*: the sense can be of change either of place or of affection, and hence imply inconstancy as well as absence. (See note on Sonnet 97, line 5; Sonnet 116, line 4.)
- reserve*: preserve, keep, store up: Sonnet 85, line 3.
- respect*: pay attention to. (See note on Sonnet 85, line 13.)
- review*: look again at (the literal ‘re-view’). Sonnet 74, line 5.
- revolt*: change of allegiance in affection—hence ‘act of inconstancy’.
 Sonnet 92, line 10.
- revolution*: recurrence in a cycle. Sonnet 59, line 12.
- rude(ly)*: rough(ly), uncouth(ly). Sonnet 11, line 10; Sonnet 66, line 6;
 Sonnet 129, line 4.
- sad*: as well as ‘sorrowful’, this word could also sometimes mean ‘sober’, ‘solemn’, ‘dull’, ‘heavy’, ‘dreary’. (See the varying uses in Sonnet 30, line 11; Sonnet 56, line 9; Sonnet 65, line 2; Sonnet 107, line 6.)
- scope*: the etymological meaning ‘aim’ or ‘mark’ is retained by Shakespeare, and in Sonnet 29, line 7 is extended to the modern sense of ‘range’.
- seeming* (adj.): deceptively apparent—the sense in Shakespeare usually tending to the pejorative. Sonnet 138, line 11.
- seeming* (n.): appearance, outward show. Sonnet 102, line 1.
- shadow*: image, reflection in a mirror, image in the mind, etc., opposed to reality. Sonnet 27, line 10; Sonnet 53, lines 2 (see note) and 4; Sonnet 98, line 14.
- simplicity*: half-wittedness, ignorant folly. Sonnet 66, line 11.

skill: knowledge, discernment (not primarily the modern technical sense, though it sometimes carries this). Sonnet 66, line 10; Sonnet 106, line 12.

*soil**(Q. 1609 *soyle*): (see note on Sonnet 69, line 14).

solemn: joyously ceremonious—the old sense quite lacks our lugubriousity. Sonnet 52, line 5.

spirit(s): (1) the volatile element(s) of air and fire, as opposed to the heavy earth and water, which four elements, according to the theory of the time, together composed a man; (2) vital energy. Sonnet 56, line 8; Sonnet 74, line 8 (partly) in sense (1). (See note on Sonnet 129, line 1 for sense (2).)

sportive: amorously wanton. Sonnet 121, line 6.

spring (of the year): the word then carried much more literal consciousness of the time of rising sap. Sonnet 53, line 9; Sonnet 63, line 8; Sonnet 102, line 5.

stain (vb.) (intr.): grow dim, lose colour and brightness. Sonnet 33, line 14.

statute: security against a debt. Sonnet 134, line 9.

still (adv.): always, constantly. (Frequent.)

store: breeding (as still of cattle), increase. Sonnet 11, line 9—but in Sonnet 37, line 8 and Sonnet 64, line 8 it means ‘abundance’.

strange: belonging to others, not to the person. Sonnet 53, line 2—but in Sonnet 49, line 5 just ‘as a stranger’.

subscribe (to): submit (to), acknowledge as victor or superior. Sonnet 107, line 10.

suit (vb.): dress, clothe. Sonnet 127, line 10 (see note).

suspect (n.): suspicion. Sonnet 70, lines 3 and 13.

tell: sometimes = count, enumerate (the original meaning in ‘tell the time’), reckon, e.g. Sonnet 30, line 10. In Sonnet 138, line 12 (*told*) there is a play on two senses: (1) count, (2) the ordinary sense ‘utter’.

tincture: colour or dye. (See note on Sonnet 54, line 6.)

triumph: exult as in a public triumph (*not* ‘conquer’). Sonnet 53, line

true, truth: more frequent with the sense of fidelity than with that of fact, but often played on.

twire: peep. Sonnet 28, line 12.

unfair (vb.): deprive of beauty. Sonnet 5, line 4.

unjust: faithless, perfidious, false in loyalty or love; possibly also untruthful. (See note on Sonnet 138, line 8.)

unrespected: unattended to, not looked at, unfocused on, not clearly seen and apprehended. Sonnet 54, line 10.

vainly: (1) unfoundedly; (2) emptily, unreasonably, idly; (3) fruitlessly. Sonnet 138, line 3; Sonnet 147, line 12 (sense (2) only).

vaunt: exult, swagger (rather than the modern 'boast'). Sonnet 15, line 7.

want: lack. Sonnet 69, line 2; Sonnet 87, line 7.

wanton (and thence *wantonly*): gaily irresponsible—a word lighter, less pejorative than its popular use today. Sonnet 54, line 7; Sonnet 97, line 7 (but see note).

waste(s): things wasted or destroyed. Sonnet 12, line 10 (see note).

weed: dress. Sonnet 2, line 4.

whether . . . whether (sometimes contracted to *wh'er*): used in correlative interrogatives either subordinate or indirect. Sonnet 59, lines 11–12.

will: in Sonnet 134, line 2 the word is played on in two senses: 'wishes', and 'lust'.

wink: droop with sleepiness, close. Sonnet 56, line 6.

wit: (1) wisdom, common sense; (2) intelligence; (3) clever mind, intelligent person. Sonnet 140, line 5 (sense (1)); frequent in sense (2); Sonnet 59, line 13 (sense (3)).

wonder (vb.): admire (in the modern sense of the latter word). Sonnet 98, line 9; Sonnet 106, line 14.

would: would want to, would like to, would wish to. (Frequent.) N.B. Shakespeare seldom uses *would*, which expresses resolve or desire, for the less forceful *should*, as modern American and some Midland and Northern English dialects do (though see note on Sonnet 44, line 2).

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